

INFLUENCES OF LIFELONG LEARNING
ON ADULTS' EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES
OF RETURNING TO FORMAL LEARNING CONTEXTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This multi-site qualitative study focused on mature students' meanings for and experiences of learning inside and outside formal education. Its purpose was to ascertain how influences of lifelong learning shape adults' expectations and experiences of returning to a formal learning situation after a gap of at least three years. Eight cycles of inquiry were guided by continual data analysis. Sources for data collection and analysis during cycles 1-7, involving 48 participants, included life story interviews with 35; group interviews with 21, 11 of whom were also seen individually or in pairs; conversations with students; written material; reflexive field notes. Two cycles involved follow ups of participants who had moved to another formal learning situation. Additional groups of adult learners were used in Cycle 8 to check meaningfulness and credibility of the final data analysis. In Cycles 1-7, adults spoke from the vantage points of 55 different formal learning situations, 48 of which were in higher education. The majority of participants are identified as 'non-traditional' in the higher education literature.

The final analysis is presented in four main sections: learning during the initial school years; learning as an adult outside formal education; expectations of and transitions to formal learning contexts; experiences of formal learning situations, and especially higher education. An additional section summarises checks for meaningfulness and credibility of the final data analysis with study and non-study participants. The notion of 'disjunction and integration' serves to organise the final analysis. Learning experiences characterised by disjunction or integration are seen to shape a sense of 'learner identity and possibility' in particular ways. These sensitising concepts provide a way of illuminating the situation of adult learners from a perspective not currently found in the literature relating to access and mature students. The implications of study outcomes are considered with respect to current concerns to widen access to British higher education.

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Introductory notes on stylistic conventions used in this thesis

Voice 1:

Epistemological underpinnings

This study has been carried out within a framework of assumptions and values that I initially associated with a qualitative research approach. I now, however, associate them with with new paradigm research, or post-positivism (Reason and Rowan, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and current thinking on feminist research (Harding, 1987; Stanley and Wise,¹⁹⁸³/: Roberts, 1981; Marshall, 1986; Wilkinson, 1986) In keeping with both paradigms, the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are subject to critical reflection, and are part of the data supporting or contraindicating research outcomes. In this thesis, I have adopted two voices in order to keep my objective subjectivity visible for the reader, while also allowing the 'story of the research' to unfold.

Voice 1

The main body of the text is in this type face, signalling 'voice one.' Through this, I develop the argument, and trace the chronological story of the research. In most respects, I follow the usual conventions of 'writing up', especially with regard to a study which has used a qualitative research methodology.

Voice 2:

Voice 2 is indented, in single space^{and italics} and is always signalled as, *Voice 2*, in order to distinguish it clearly from the field record and voice 1.

This voice serves as a kind of counterpoint to the chronological story of the thesis provided through the main text, or Voice One, and as such, has a number of functions. Through it, I foreshadow developments in my own thinking, arising from critical reflection on my own experience and themes emerging from continual data analysis. I indicate, for example, how something that was not clear at one stage became clearer at another. I also use the second voice to show how my initial explicit assumptions were challenged, changed, elaborated or undermined as a result of my engagements in the study. Through it, I highlight for the reader those times in the research when tacit rather than conscious knowing was determining directions, or blinkers were operating with respect to themes in the data. I also discuss struggles and breakthroughs related to achieving a "realised level of consciousness" (Rowan, 1981). Finally, I reflect on aspects of my own story as a learner, considering points of consonance and dissonance with themes that emerged from the final analysis illuminating complexities and contradictions.

Through the second voice, therefore, I seek to make who I am, as 'the human instrument' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) who was involved in the collection and analysis of data, visible. In such ways, I try to address some of the key 'validity' concerns that are seen to be appropriate for disciplined inquiry carried out within these paradigms (discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis).

The use of the first person

My decision to write in the first person is coherent with the epistemological and methodological values associated with the paradigms within which this work has been undertaken. Paradigm shifts in the social and natural sciences take account of considerable evidence pointing to the fact that the very act of objectifying alters that which we hope to see. Instead, I suggest that explicitness about who I am as a person in relation to the world, and in relation to the processes and outcomes of the study, offers a sounder starting point

for establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As Salmon argues, the use of the first person,

"allows - in fact, demands - that what is said reflects the particular situation, experience, understandings and dilemmas of the speaker. It is ultimately those which govern the meaning, or lack of meaning, that any academic material will have." (Salmon, 1983, p. 89)

I shall address the broader epistemological issues inherent in this stance in the thesis itself (Chapter 2) with reference to arguments in a now substantive literature on this topic.

Voices one and two

Voice two is used in Parts I and II of the thesis. Part III is written in one voice.

The interweavings of voice one and two are intended to convey how subjective involvement can be risked, in order to gain, "new theoretical understanding." (Callaway, 1981, p. 470)

The use of appendices

The main body of the text is intended to stand alone. The appendices are offered in order to provide additional illuminative material that are supportive but not integral to the analysis and arguments put forward in the text. For example, in Chapter 3, reference charts and illustrations of specific methodological points are offered. In Part II, longer excerpts from transcripts, from which quotations in the analysis have been taken, are provided when available. In such cases, the corresponding appendix is identified in the opening paragraph of the relevant section of the text. When citations are not provided for a quotation from the field record, the reader will know that a longer excerpt is available in the Appendix. Occasionally, the reader is referred to the appendices, for additional excerpts illustrating a particular theme that are not discussed in the main text.

Citations of the field record:

The use of data in this study is signalled with the notation, Field record. Capital letters are used to indicate my questions and contributions during an interview; regular typeface indicates participants responses. Commentary and descriptive comment is provided in italics.

Although the thinking behind my use of this notation is offered in the text (Chapter 3), I address the conventions that I use here, for the purposes of clarity and ease of reference:

-The following kind of notation in most cases appears after an excerpt from the field record in the main body of the text or in a longer excerpt provided in the supporting appendix: e.g. I, 6: 271/14.

Roman numeral: I-VIII, indicates the cycle of the research during which data was collected.

Arabic numeral: 6, 7, 8, or 9 indicates the structural heading under which the data was analysed at the end of the study: 6= school years, 7= learning as an adult outside the system, 8= transition, and 9= the experience of returning. These numberings correspond to earlier chapter numberings, which are now offered as Chapters 4-7.

Arabic numbers after colon: These refer to the card number on which that excerpt had been recorded. A '0' in front of this number indicates that the person identified themselves as middle class. No 0 indicates that the person identified themselves as working class. (See Chapter 3 for explanation and further detail)

Number after '/': This refers to the page number of the transcript from which the card excerpt was taken.

-In the cases of follow up interviews, my notation simply refers to date and type of data collection: for example, 'October 16, 1989: written response to final analysis.' 'May 11, follow up interview.'

Conclusion

The cumulative effect of these stylistic conventions enable me to work more effectively within a paradigm which begins with an acknowledgement of simultaneously shaping 'multiple realities.' Together, they help me to communicate to the reader some critical dimensions to the 'surplus reality' (Moreno, 1945) that are at issue when human beings give meaning to their interactions within complex social systems.

It is my hope that the relevance of these conventions to the epistemological stance which I have adopted, and to the essence of this undertaking, will become clearer through the experience of actively engaging with the parts and the whole of this dissertation.

Susan Warner Weil

September, 1989

PART I

UNDERPINNINGS

CHAPTER ONE

Literature and experience contributing to the formulation of the research questions

1. Introduction

This study is concerned with influences of lifelong learning, inside and outside formal education, on how adults anticipate and subsequently experience, formal learning contexts, and themselves as learners in such situations. The study focuses in particular on students who are often referred to as 'non-traditional' in the literature:

"Adult returners, [who] by virtue of their previous educational qualifications, life and work experience, as well as their class, gender, and/or race, have been traditionally under-represented in institutions of higher education in Britain." (Weil, 1988)

I adopted this research focus at a time in Britain when the elitism of its higher education system, and the bias towards such students, were being addressed by policy and planning bodies and influential figures in higher education. (e.g. Fulton, 1981; Warren Piper, 1981; Williams and Blackstone, 1983; Neave, 1976; Trow, 1981; Squires, 1981; Flather, 1983). A number of forces (demographic, technological, social and economic) were combining to make access to higher education by such students a critically important issue. In particular, questions were being raised about the capacity of traditional higher education institutions and academic staff to respond effectively and flexibly to the needs of a more diversified and age-comprehensive student population who had the "ability to benefit from higher education" (UGC, 1984).

My concerns with access generally, and with the situation of mature students returning to study were rooted in my own life and work experiences as, for example: an educationalist involved in bringing about innovations designed to make higher education programmes more responsive to changing social and economic circumstances; a potential mature student in 1974, who, as a result of an unexpected change of

countries, encountered numerous structural and attitudinal barriers making my own return to study in Britain impossible at that time; as an adult educator who worked outside formal education with all sorts of adult learners on whom access concerns were now focussed; and finally, as a mature student myself, in 1982, prior to beginning this research.

Such experiences had deepened my understanding of the relevance of particular kinds of policy, structural and practice changes advocated in major documents of the time (e.g. UGC, 1984; NAB, 1984a,b; ACACE, 1982; Fulton, 1981). The questions and issues arising from my own life and work experience had also fuelled my commitment to engage in disciplined inquiry that might illuminate some of the complexities entailed in making formal learning contexts more responsive to adults as learners.

This thesis represents an attempt to document the journey of the research on different levels, as well as its outcomes. My engagements in data collection and analysis, and my interactions with different people along the way (through reading and direct encounter) have generated both struggles and breakthroughs in my own thinking and understanding. The research process has given rise to many new questions: particularly, about what it means to learn and to be a learner in different contexts over time and about how research aims and methods, and taken for granted worldviews, or paradigms, influence our research assumptions and outcomes. In many ways, who I am today feels a very different person from the one who began this research in 1984.

The study has enriched challenged, and indeed changed, much of my thinking, my values and my assumptions about 'adult learning' and adults as learners. In undertaking the writing up of its process, however, I am confronted by the challenge facing anyone who chooses as I have to work within a post-positivist paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). How do I do justice to the journey? How do I chart the obstacles and breakthroughs I have experienced along the way? How do I convey the extent to which the research itself gave rise not only to fresh perspectives on old dilemmas and questions, but to new

perspectives altogether?

I begin to tackle these challenges in Chapters 1 and 2, the main purpose of which is to communicate 'where I was' in 1984. I shall reflect on how certain aspects of my personal and professional experience gave rise to particular questions and concerns at the beginning of the study. I shall also map some of the reading which, through what it said and what it also did not say, focused particular strands of my life and work experience and my starting assumptions in this enquiry. Throughout I shall approach the literature,

"... actively and personally...from the viewpoint of one's own contexts, one's own questions, one's own lived and known experience - [in order both to] enrich and develop one's own personal understandings and to create a structure of meaning within which [this research] can be viewed." (Salmon, 1983, p.91)

Throughout, as indicated in my introductory notes to this thesis, I shall use a second voice to document what Rowan (drawing on Hegel) refers to as a, "realised level of consciousness." Rowan distinguishes this from a 'primary level' which he identifies as one-sidedly subjective, or a social level, one-sidedly objective. A realised level brings primary subjective experience up through a social level, and uses the resulting changes in both intuitive and conscious ways to maintain an 'objective subjectivity: "enabling us continually to see the wood as well as the trees." (Rowan, 1981, p. 116.) Through this voice, I shall anticipate some of the issues that became clearer, and the core assumptions that were challenged, as a direct result of the research process and outcomes. Issues related to epistemology and post-positivism will also begin to be seen as central strand in this study, since a different set of assumptions and research practices might have led to very different research outcomes. (This latter strand is introduced towards the end of this chapter and developed further in Chapters 2 and 3.)

I begin by exploring some connections between my own life story and my initial preoccupations in this inquiry. I then review four key areas of literature which helped to validate the importance of my questions, and shaped the focus and nature of the study.

2. A web of connectedness

Gregory Bateson refers to a story as a, "little knot or complex of that species of connectedness which we call *relevance*" (Bateson, 1979, p. 22, original emphasis). The purpose of this section is to begin to spin a web of connectedness between this thesis and aspects of my own story.

2.1. Professional involvement in innovation and change in higher education

In the U.S., beginning in 1972, I worked for a Consortium of colleges and universities each with a different set of traditions focusing on particular target groups. One was a Black university; one was a community college, with students of all ages largely from blue collar families; one was a large Catholic University, comprised of largely 18-21 year old white middle class students; one was a women's liberal arts college catering largely for young students from wealthy family backgrounds. I worked for the Consortium office itself, which specialised in setting up cross-institutional innovative pilot programmes, with government funding. I developed an interdisciplinary studies programme for students specialising in human science/service areas, such as psychology, social work, and special education. The programme involved structured experiential learning, learning contracts, reflection on learning processes, experiential group work and reading that was relevant to individual needs and questions arising from field placements. At the time, I ^{was} applying the ideas of Carl Rogers to professional education courses in a higher education setting (Rogers, 1961, 1969). This work had been very challenging and rewarding. It had involved me as much as a learner as a teacher, since my programme tended to attract students who were unrepresentative of the majority in U.S. higher education. Access in the early 1970's - for older students and for those from different social backgrounds - was just becoming a mainstream higher education issue in America and my programme represented an attempt to offer something that would have personal meaning as well as professional relevance for diverse groups of students. Many of the students' journals on these courses provided some evidence that this had been

the case. This experience deepened my commitment to working in education, and in 1974, I made plans to go back to Boston and do a PhD in Education. Family circumstances brought me to England instead, where I felt I had no choice but to stay and see a particular situation through.

If I had been interviewed at this time, prior to changing countries, I probably would have referred to my good fortune in the number of opportunities that had enabled me to develop my ideas, and the post graduate study choices that were now open to me as a result of a small but growing reputation. I would have spoken about my commitments to challenging social injustice through education, and widening educational opportunity for adults. I would have perceived higher education as an unequivocal good.

2.2. From within to outside the educational system: a detour?

When I changed countries, I expected to be able to pursue my plans to study. Instead, I directly confronted many of the attitudinal and structural barriers that only relatively recently have become the focus for debate and action within British higher education: for example, entry requirements that fail to recognise experiential learning, rather than merely formal qualifications as a basis for entry or changing disciplines at post-graduate level (Evans, 1984, 1988); a lack of part time, evening, and modular study (including credit transfer) opportunities (Tight, 1982, 1987; Percy, 1985; CNA, 1988); the unavailability of student loans to support study not financed by grants (e.g. Woodhall, 1989); subject, staff and sector boundaries (e.g. Schuller, Tight and Weil, 1988; Percy, 1988); and the organisation of study (Burgess, 1985).

My legal status - as an alien - also cast a new light on rights and privileges that in my own country had largely been implicit and not at issue for me. Instead, my situation now forced me to think about these things explicitly. For example, I could not work, except in jobs that were approved by the Home Office and fulfilled the legal requirements for a work permit.

These barriers channelled me outside the formal education system - both as a professional and a learner. There I continued to develop my ideas about innovative teaching and learning processes. I also had to consider them in very new arenas: in service organisations, in community education, and through setting up and running professional development programmes outside higher education institutions. For a very long time, I felt detoured from my 'mainstream' career directions and interests.

There was, however, much learning from this detour that I neither valued nor understood at the beginning of this study. As indicated above, the second voice in this thesis will continue to illustrate some ways in which various dimensions of the so-called detour, and earlier experiential learning, were surfaced, and given new meaning, through the various cycles of the research. But now I shall focus on the period prior to beginning this research, since it was in these engagements with adult learners that my initial preoccupations, germane to the study, were shaped.

2.3. Working as an adult educator

In 1979, I was fully resident, and free to pursue employment choices. I was attracted by, and eventually offered, a new position as Head of a new three year Development Project in Education and Training for a national voluntary association in an area where no previous professional development work had been done: foster care practice.

The purpose of the project was to 'train trainers' in Social Services Departments throughout the country to work with groups of foster parents and social workers. The professional development approach was to be based on adapted American training packages/^{that built} on adult learning processes and principles from writers such as Malcolm Knowles (1973) and David Kolb (1975). My own, and the organisation's commitment, was to developing 'leadership/facilitator teams', comprised of foster parents and social workers - each of whom brought different perspectives, experiences, commitments and skills to their staff development function.

Often the foster parents had few, if any, educational qualifications, and many were working class women. The social workers tended to come from a wide range of social class backgrounds and most had done their professional training in higher education. The aim of the national trainer training programme was to empower pairs of staff developers to return to their local communities and departments and set up and run courses based on these training packages with mixed groups working in adolescent and child care.

My energies in designing the trainer training programmes focused on course design, methods and processes that I hoped would facilitate collaborative learning, active involvement, and the development of insights and skills as professionals and future trainers, relevant to working with adults as learners. I developed activities designed to engage participants in reflecting on their own experiences -as people, as learners, as foster parents and social workers, as 'former children and adolescents'. These reflections became the basis for considering the implications of working with other adults as learners on such issues. Drawing on the theories of Kolb (1975) and Knowles (1973) about adult and experiential learning,(discussed below) my aim was to help 'trainer training' participants to build their own 'theories' of action for working with mixed groups of adults - from different social, educational and occupational backgrounds. Activities and group work (involving planning and running sessions from the training package) enabled participants to test out in action the 'working hypotheses' generated by the various reflections and analyses arising from their re-examination of their own experience. Practice with constructive feedback, and the overall climate of the course, were intended to support risk taking and creativity, as well as 'personal sense making' with regard to the learning taking place.

Each five day residential trainer training course I ran forced me to confront the emotions and vulnerabilities that I have learned are so very much a part of adult learning situations. The climate for learning - support, challenge, collaborative working - seemed essential, to overcoming fears and anxieties about 'being a learner' on a course. I felt I could never take these for granted. Building trust was like holding a fistful of sand. Squeeze too hard and it was

gone. My bedroom was several times located adjacent to the public phone, and I would cringe as I listened through the too thin walls to participants panicking on the phone to partners on the first night, as they recounted their perceptions of what they had 'let themselves in for'.

I gradually realised that many of these adults and particularly the foster parents, came with the expectation that this course would be 'like school' and therefore little different from their previous experience in formal education. Sadly, for many of these working class women, this experience had been very negative. The majority had been in no formal learning situation for many years.

From their perspective, these courses were formal because they took place in a group with a 'teacher'; they lasted for a week, and for many this meant being away from their families for the first time; and at the end, you were 'allowed' to do something different that you were unable to do before - in particular, a job that had status and that recognised your experience and skills in working with children and young people in the community.

From the first trainer training course, the active exploration of previous experiences of education and anxieties about being a participant on this course was central, and many painful stories emerged about what they had expected and why. We also considered if and how this course felt different in relation to previous experiences of school, employment training or higher education.

Fortunately for many, panic on the first night gave way to exhilaration and enjoyment by the fourth day - usually after they had led their two hour session in teams and had experienced a structured feedback session. There was also a great deal of sharing and laughter along the way. In addition, however, participants told of their scars from formal education, during the course of structured activities over lunch and in the evenings. Many spoke about how they had vowed never to set foot on any kind of course again. I do not think I ever stopped feeling shocked by this, since I had always tended to associate education with growth, excitement, challenge. There were

also what I interpreted as cultural differences. In the U.S., greater educational opportunity was available for adults from different social backgrounds, and education was perceived as a means of 'social mobility'. I had never before heard people speak about education in this way, with so many negative perceptions predominating. Moreover, a surprising number of social workers were critical of their professional training, although they would often acknowledge that the qualification had given them access to opportunities that were important.

I believe that the contrast between this course and the participants' previous experiences of formal education, coupled with the intensity and quality of relationships that were often developed over five days in a residential setting, gave me access to many dimensions of experience that I had never before considered. It was both rewarding and disturbing to have so many affirm that this course enabled them to experience something different as learners. I would often hear people saying to others that this was because we used an 'adult learning approach' - something that was discussed explicitly on the course using the ideas of various writers in the field. They would describe this using phrases like: "really talking"; , "really valuing people's experience"; "having a chance to teach social workers something"; "learning that foster parents had something to teach us".

Each course represented an immense responsibility. I often felt that I was at risk of intruding inappropriately into these adults' lives. How could I gently urge them towards new domains for learning and be neither arrogant nor disrespectful? This question never became easier; if anything, with each course, I became increasingly aware of the difficulties and implications of this question, in relation to these adults' lives. I would return home from each course both exhilarated and exhausted and I tended to dwell morbidly on those few whom I personally felt I had failed in some way. I came to regard each subsequent course as providing an opportunity to build on what I had learnt in the previous one.

When I was appointed to this post, foster parents' attitudes had been perceived as the major barrier to engaging them in any kind of

professional development. Equally, social workers were regarded as largely complacent about their practice, and had been stereotyped as incapable of learning alongside foster parents. I believe we successfully overcame many of these perceptions. The sheer numbers who came on this programme and subsequently attended local programmes (2000+ between 1979 and 1983 in the majority of local authority social services departments in Britain) (Weil, 1983) created ripples of change within social services foster care services, particularly with regard to the ways training and professional development opportunities were conceived and implemented.

Voice 2: I realise now, at the end of this particular research journey, that despite the many 'successes' and 'highs' of these courses, I was using very narrow frameworks for making sense of adults' stories about their prior experiences of education. I can see that I was unable to attend to the real complexity of what we were experiencing and what I was hearing. I was convinced that 'methods' and 'progressive educational approaches' were the key to unlocking adults' potential and enthusiasm.

Admittedly, for many of these adults my attitudes and approaches afforded a qualitatively different learning experience from any that they had encountered previously. Nonetheless, I realise now the extent to which, despite my stated commitments about 'valuing experience', only particular aspects of their and my own experience were at issue in that environment. For example, diversity was a key feature of the groups - in terms of professional status, previous educational backgrounds, class, gender, political awareness and individual and social commitments. Few Black people attended this programme. I saw my responsibility as one of helping to create an environment in which the experiences arising from differences would be respected and treated as central to the learning and development process in which we were all involved. But, there was a great deal of experience which I did not 'hear' and tacitly, discouraged, as focal points for active exploration in that learning environment. I believe at the time I shut down all sorts of opportunities for learning - my own and others. I would have been threatened by too overt an expression of differences.

In retrospect, I believe I was guilty of leading a rallying cry for commonality and solidarity against 'traditional methods of teaching'. As such, I suspect I did in fact do violence to some of the ways in which people were 'reading' what was happening from their own personal stance (Salmon, 1988, 1989). My own preoccupations caused me to miss out on a great deal of complexity arising from those adults' lived experience that would have greatly enriched our learning. It was this kind of complexity that this research enabled me to discover, forcing me to review my prior experience as an adult educator and indeed as a woman from new perspectives.

For example, I know now from my own experience how often it may not be until after an event that I will become aware of how the delicate nuances of my own different 'readings' of what was happening have been trampled upon and re-interpreted within others' interpretative frameworks of meaning or against male norms. I believe² that there was a great deal of experience in these groups that I shut out altogether. I also believe that there was a great deal of experience that I assumed, and re-interpreted in my own conceptual framework. Because of my power as course facilitator, my framework could all too easily become the dominant framework. I also realise now that such power does not operate in a vacuum - for example, I am a white facilitator, and therefore can 'trade off' a great deal of existing power in the culture.

But this learning resulted only from subjecting these issues to disciplined inquiry, and adopting an epistemology and methodology that required me to subject also my own experience and preconceptions to disciplined inquiry, as I shall discuss in subsequent chapters. When I began the study, certain experiences in my professional and personal life, and issues arising from certain kinds of reading, dominated my perceptions of what was at issue in adult learning. I was preoccupied with methods, course designs, course climates. I was caught up in assumptions influenced by my cultural, class, and educational background. But, as will be discussed below, my own experience as a mature student further convinced me that new methods and progressive approaches were the solution to making higher education genuinely responsive to the needs of more diverse and particularly non-traditional students.

2.4 Expectations and experiences: becoming a mature student

It was to be eight years before my work, and my personal and financial circumstances, enabled me to become a mature student. I was in the fourth year of my work on the national trainer training programme. My relationship with my second husband whom I had met two years previously supported me in taking what I then saw as a considerable risk. I had come to devalue my experience, and regretted my failure to do post-graduate study.

My main reason for returning was to get additional qualifications, and the Institute of Education seemed the most relevant place to try once again to pick up the threads of study I had been so determined to pursue eight years previously. However, I also hoped for intellectual stimulation, as well as a chance to examine, and build, upon my experience in working with adult learners on issues of adult learning outside higher education. I also looked forward to grappling with some

of the issues and questions of concern to me together with other educationalists.

It was agreed that I could do a one year qualifying taught course, after which I could progress to an M.A. in the psychology of education. I had always been a 'good student', and I readily fell back into habits and disciplines that had previously held me in good stead. But my expectations and my experiences seemed to be at odds with each other.

On my own, when I was reading and studying, I was fine. As ever, I was a motivated and independent learner, and would actively relate what I was reading to my own thinking and experience. My reading and private study, however, confronted me with the boundaries of the discipline of psychology which I had not ever before considered. I wanted to learn more about what I saw at the time as the 'psychology of adult learning'. In my own work, I thought I had begun this, by relating existing adult learning theory to actually working with adult learners. I had been developing my own 'theory in use' (Argyris and Schon, 1974) over many years. Many of the adults whom I had encountered during my 'detour' had made a conscious decision never to re-enter the formal educational system again because of their prior experiences. These were the preoccupations which were uppermost in my mind.

But in the academic literature of our syllabus, there were few references to adults, and virtually no consideration of the issues which I associated with the 'study of learning'. There was no mention of the institutions within which learning takes place, nor the struggles and emotions that affect people's experiences as learners. When I looked up 'learning' in the subject catalogue of the library, I encountered books steeped in behaviourist assumptions; what adult learning literature there was within psychology was concerned largely with memory, and the effects of aging. I had never considered the extent to which psychological and educational literature presented such an anaesthetised and narrow view of the world. This in itself was a major shock. For this literature now seemed to bear little if

any relevance to my own lived experience, as a learner and as an educator.

Whenever I would try to bring these questions, or dimensions from my work into the seminars, I would feel myself hitting unstated but powerfully felt norms. Such explorations seemed taboo. Opportunities to make connections across disciplines, between the discipline and life/work experience, and across conflicting perspectives within the discipline seemed to be discouraged. Research within formal education (primary and secondary), or experimental work in laboratories (largely with animals) determined the boundaries for discussions of learning.

In seminars, lectures and other engagements with tutors and students, I kept experiencing a great deal of frustration, isolation, and disorientation. These feelings baffled me, since they were not feelings I had ever associated with formal study.

2.5. Making sense of my experience: Knowles and Kolb as dominant influences at that time

I did however struggle to make sense of what was happening by considering what I was experiencing in terms of the theorists with whom I had become familiar through my work in trainer training: in particular, Malcolm Knowles (1973, 1978) and David Kolb (1975). These two writers deserve mention for three reasons. First, they had had a fundamental impact on my thinking as an adult educator. Secondly, they provided the conceptual frameworks through which I could interpret my experience as a mature student at the time, and account for my difficulties in 'rational terms'. Finally, my conceptualisation of 'the problem' in terms of their ideas, and the work of other 'educational reformers' with whom I had been familiar in the past, underpinned my initial engagements in this study.

My work in 'training trainers', as described above, was focused on designing and facilitating courses that promoted satisfying and effective adult learning, as well as the development of skills and understandings that would enable participants to become more effective in designing and facilitating courses for other adult learners.

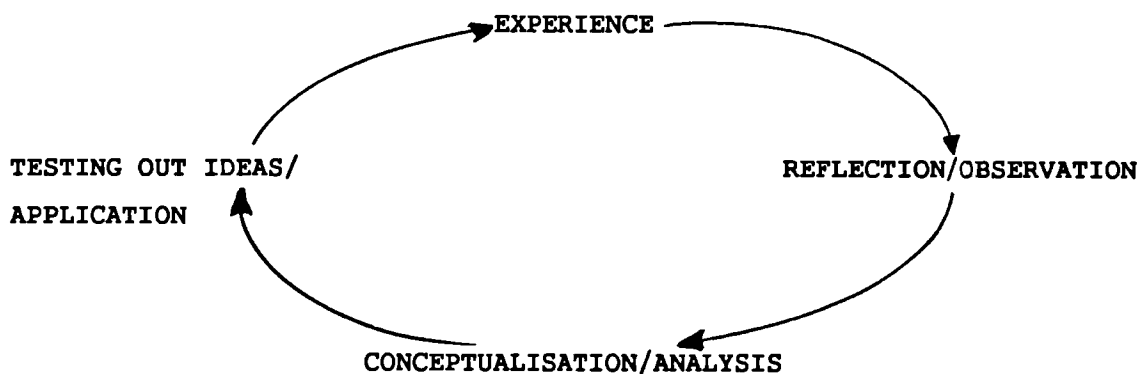
Malcolm Knowles, and David Kolb had had a significant influence on my own approach since their ideas were embedded in the 'curriculum packages' with which I was working, and which had come originally from America. (CWLA, 1976, 1978) I felt convinced by the positive impact of the different approaches that they advocated for working with adult learners over and over again. My experience 'told me' that adult learning programmes that reflected their ideas and values could change many adults' orientations, and previous resistance to, education or training of any kind. This experience chimed with my own previous work in the States.

Knowles' ideas derived from humanistic psychology and human resource development in organisations, and at the time, represented a challenge to the limitations of behaviourism and theories of learning based on animal experiments. The core of his thinking centres, however, on distinguishing a 'theory of adult teaching and learning' from a 'theory of teaching children'. He characterises the two approaches as 'andragogy and pedagogy', each of which he regards as being based on different assumptions about learning and learners, and having different implications for the role of the teacher, and for the design of the learning programme. The term 'andragogy', meaning 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (Knowles, 1980, p 31) has been popularised by Knowles, and his andragogy-pedagogy formulation has immense popular appeal. Long argues that it gave adult trainers and educators a professional identity in relation to work which was often marginalised from mainstream educational concerns (Long, 1987). Knowles' work was published at a time in America when the numbers of adults seeking a return to study were growing, and adults as learners were recognised as a force to be reckoned with. The book built on the influence of humanistic psychology generally in the U.S. and offered a rationale for an alternative approach to teaching and learning. Speaking more personally, the ideas of Knowles enabled me to connect my work as an adult educator with the ideas of other educational reformers who had influenced my earlier professional thinking and practice. These had included A.S. Neill (e.g. 1968); Jerome Bruner (e.g. 1971); John Dewey (e.g. 1938) E.P. Torrance (e.g. 1965); Carl Rogers (1969, 1961); Abraham Maslow (1970) and Ivan Illich (1971).

Knowles' book was written in a 'folksy' style, and was aimed directly at people working largely outside formal education systems, and particularly trainers working in organisations - the group with whom I had come to identify. His ideas found their way into a large number of continuing professional development initiatives in the U.S.A. and the assumptions of andragogy became associated with normative practice for working with mature students, and indeed adult learners in any educational and training initiative. (e.g. Knowles, 1984)

The ideas of David Kolb were also embedded in the curriculum packages which were the focus of my trainer training initiatives, and he too had clarified other aspects of my thinking about adult and experiential learning. In 1975, Kolb and Fry wrote an article in which they introduced their 'cycle of experiential learning', reproduced as Figure I.

Figure I. The experiential learning model.



Kolb and Fry, 1975

This work, as I learned later, emerged out of their research on learning styles. As a trainer, I had only encountered the experiential learning cycle. But, as with Knowles, Kolb's ideas connected with my earlier American training in group processes, and with previous study of Kurt Lewin (e.g. 1935, 1951), The cycle had helped me to clarify much of my own thinking about course design and good adult and 'experiential learning practice'. Kolb's ideas had also offered a conceptual framework which had proved helpful in triggering adults'

reflections on their own experience as learners, and in turn, their considerations of what they were doing when they planned and facilitated courses, or used experiential learning approaches. For example, Kolb's model provided a way of thinking about what I and many others saw at the time as less desirable educational and therapeutic imports from America, such as encounter groups. We spoke about groups that 'got stuck' on experience and reflection, at the expense of any wider analysis or testing out new ideas and insights. Kolb's ideas for me conveyed the importance of 'balance' and the need to integrate different kinds of learning - something which had been at the heart of the new professional education programmes I had been involved with in the States. At experiential and intuitive levels, his ideas 'made sense' to me, and to many with whom I had worked.

So, as a mature student, one of the ways in which I made sense of what I was experiencing was to attribute my difficulties to the imbalanced emphasis placed only on certain ways of learning at the expense of others in that environment. For example, experience, other than through reading what was on the syllabus was not highly valued; intellectual analysis, not reflection on values and feelings, was stressed; application was not at issue on this course. The abstract and the symbolic were valued most of all. This was in direct contrast to the kinds of learning environments I had tried to create in my work, where I had sought to integrate the various dimensions of Kolb's model into a series of recurring cycles, each building on the outcomes of previous ones.

Kolb and Knowles together seemed to build logically on my previous preoccupations about teaching and learning, and helped me to feel confident in the validity of the theoretical rationale that underpinned my earlier work in the U.S. and later with adult learners in this country.

So, although I essentially experienced this first year as a mature student on a taught course as a private and lonely enterprise, I concluded that my experience in that learning situation was largely idiosyncratic. As tutors and colleagues, we were, it seemed, speaking different languages about education. I could account for my discomfort

and discontent, however, in various ways. For example, we had different fields of practice. Tutors and colleagues were essentially concerned with and had experience of, working with primary and secondary age children, or in the area of formal psychology. The Department's leanings were behaviouristic. My concerns were with adult learners and my leanings were more humanistic. I was caught up in a paradox that seemed particular to me and my situation: in my work environment, I was getting people to think about their own experiences as learners in terms of Knowles' 'andragogy principles'. Here was I, in a situation where pedagogy (as Knowles defined it) predominated.

Fortunately, however, several tutors offered relationships which provided the space and support I needed to regard my work outside formal education as valid and valuable; the pressure seemed to be on me to do otherwise. They helped me to treat the course more instrumentally: to see it as a passport to further opportunities. I therefore focused my attention on what I might do in future, should I do well in the exams.

One of the tutors who helped me to make some sense of what I was experiencing became my supervisor on this thesis; the other was the person who persuaded me to come back to study, and later helped me to overcome bureaucratic obstacles so that I could register directly for an M. Phil. He had been intensely interested in what I had been doing outside the formal system. Both of these people advocated on my behalf, and also 'heard' and understood my difficulties in trying to reconcile my experience as a person and a professional 'out there' and my experience as a student 'in here'.

At the end of that year, a third tutor unknowingly threw me a lifejacket. We were chatting in the cafeteria one day and she asked about my background. She suggested that I get in contact with the London University Centre for Staff Development in Higher Education, where there were people who were centrally concerned with issues of teaching and learning. I did this, and was offered a short-term staff contract the following autumn, at the same time as, on the strength of my examination performance, I was granted permission to do an M.Phil/PhD in the Psychology department. People at the Centre were

also concerned with methods in learning, and Knowles was not just known to them but of concern in their approaches to course design and process. This was immensely exciting to me, since I still was concerned to become better acquainted with relevant academic literature that could inform and enrich my own understandings of adult learning.

In 1982, I had been a mature student at London University. By 1983 I was staff and working on developments in higher education - something that for eight years I had dismissed as an impossibility. My position enabled me to become involved once again in the kind of debates to which I had been so committed in my work with the Consortium, and which I had originally planned to address through post-graduate study in Boston. For the very same concerns were very much at issue in British higher education ten years later: access, continuing education, student and adult learning, the purposes of higher education in a changing society and in relation to a more diversified age comprehensive student population. I gradually came to realise the value of what I had previously undervalued as an unwanted 'career detour' and the extent to which my experiential learning and work in these areas outside the system was relevant to current developments in British higher education.

Voice 2: I realise now how at the beginning of the study a number of forces converged to focus my attention on 'progressive' versus 'traditional' educational philosophies. My experience as a mature student, alongside my experience of addressing issues of working with others on 'adult learning' led me to conclude that 'traditional approaches' to teaching were inappropriate for adult learners. From the outset, I therefore framed the 'problem' as one of teaching methods and curriculum approaches.

It is highly relevant to this study that at the time, I tended to see my 'problem' as largely (but not entirely) an individual one, particular to that educational situation, that time in my life, and my own background. It did however raise wider questions for me about the responsiveness of higher education institutions to adults with a range of expectations and prior learning experiences. Nonetheless, I was still convinced by the many positive accounts that had found their way into not just the academic literature, but also the popular literature and press about adults, and particularly women, returning to higher education. I clung to my belief in higher education learning as an essentially positive activity, associated with stimulation, challenge and the potential for profound changes in perspective. I tended to see my work in

these terms, and strongly believed that this could be and was the case in most learning situations in higher education.

I rationalised that 'that course' had been wrong for me. I saw myself as 'out of practice' as a student, and in an unusual state of heightened consciousness, because of the kind of work in which I had been involved. I concluded that I was over-reacting and expecting too much of a diploma level course designed largely for teachers as a different professional group from that with which I identified (trainers, facilitators). They were working in the system; I saw myself as working outside it. (This view also was to be fundamentally challenged by this study!) They were preoccupied with children and young people at school. I was preoccupied with adults who had left school, often with largely negative images of themselves as learners and of the formal education system.

These things may have been so, but only through the research would I be confronted with the extent to which I had fallen back all too easily on the overly simplistic frameworks provided by Kolb and Knowles to make sense of my experience, and diminish its wider implications. But then, my interpretation of my situation as a mature student was simply, (in terms of Knowles:) 'I am problem centred, as an adult learner, not subject-centred.' The solution, as I saw it at the beginning of this study, was to provide me with more choice in the design of my programme, allowing for greater interdisciplinarity.

It would be some time before I would come across the critiques of Knowles' basic assumptions - in particular that self-direction is somehow 'natural' (Tennant, 1988) and that all adult learners have the same needs. In this, again, I realise now the extent to which I was still heavily influenced by 'common sense' assumptions to which humanistic psychology appealed. I thought I was progressive in that I saw learning as a process, involving the 'whole person', rather than as merely stimuli and responses leading to specific and observable outcomes (Skinner, 1953). I would have stressed the social aspects of groups. But I had no conceptual framework for absorbing Jarvis' meaning that learning is both a psychological and social process (1987a). What I would have missed is his essential point that 'social' means far more than social interaction and groups. The paradox for me now is that I knew these things from other aspects of my personal and professional experience - my work with Black people during the period of my work permit; my own change of countries - but I did not know that I knew these things. Why was this so?

What I could not see was which aspects of my experience I was emphasising at the expense of others, and why. There were many other reasons (invisible to me at the time) as to why psychology as a discipline 'felt' inadequate to the problem as I then perceived it and some of these discoveries will be identified in subsequent chapters. My epistemological journey, as well as my continual exposure to other adult learners' stories, within the context of a disciplined inquiry involving cycles of data collection and analysis forced me to re-examine the kinds of normative assumptions that caused me to, as a friend once put it to me, 'deny the evidence of my own senses and my own experience, at my own expense.' Only much

later would I begin to question, whose sense is common sense? Is their sense my sense? I would also come to know more about the extent to which dominant norms and assumptions about learning and knowledge, were sitting uneasily with my own experiences of myself as a woman in relation to the world - the meanings and implications of which I had never thought about until cycles 5-7 of the inquiry, when I was engaged with women's stories about learning in different kinds of formal contexts and which I shall chart during the course of the thesis.

These issues, which were part of my tacit knowledge at the beginning of the study, came to be at the heart of my concerns, as I made sense of the data across the 8 cycles of the research. But in 1983, my preoccupation was thus: if adults were to come into higher education, there would need to be some radical changes in teaching and learning methods and approaches. What about adults who, like those who had been on my courses, had had negative experiences at school, and then had the opportunity to experience alternative approaches to learning on courses where the principles of people like Rogers, Knowles or Kolb were in operation? Such courses seemed to be on the increase, and afforded a contrast to much academic learning. How would such experiences affect them, should they be attracted back into formal education?

Preoccupations based on my experience guided my reading around the following four themes:

- a) A new emphasis on access and continuing education in British higher education.
- b) Adults as learners outside formal education.
- c) Learner experience studies within higher education institutions.
- d) Mature students.

My engagements with these areas of the literature played a significant role in helping me to reflect on and appreciate the wider issues arising from my experience; feel validated in the relevance of my preoccupations to emergent issues and gaps within the field of adult learning theory and research in relation to higher education; deepen my understanding of particular aspects of my own life and work experience at the heart of my research concerns; and formulate my research question.

3. The wider context for this study: a new emphasis on access and continuing education in British higher education

As indicated previously, when I started the study, there was a growing emphasis on access and continuing education in higher education. I considered it important to familiarise myself with the literature relevant to that sea-change, and to examine the extent to which issues of teaching and learning were at issue here.

Preoccupations with access and continuing education were fueled by economic and social changes, and more urgently, by the projected decline in the number of 18 year olds in the 1990's. In addition, there were indications from government that a higher participation rate in higher education was to be encouraged, and that new groups would need to be sought out to meet this target. (This was to be borne out later : DES, 1987, 1989) Access became a major policy concern for national and planning bodies (e.g. DES, 1978; UGC, 1984; NAB, 1984)

These kinds of developments stimulated the Leverhulme Programme of Study into Higher Education to make access an important feature of its inquiry. (e.g. Fulton, 1981; Williams and Blackstone, 1983). The failure of the Post-Robbins expansion of higher education to increase participation from under-represented social groups was an evident pre-occupation throughout the literature of higher education (e.g. Warren Piper, 1981; Farrant, 1981; Spender, 1981; Little and Robbins, 1981; Williamson, 1981; Woodley, 1981) and, increasingly, the implications of moving from an elitist to more of a mass system of higher education were being debated (e.g. Fulton, 1981; Trow, 1981)

In 1984, the University Grants Committee (UGC) and the National Advisory Body on Public Sector Higher Education (NAB) working parties on continuing education published the outcomes of comprehensive reviews of their respective sectors. Continuing education was defined by these groups as all structured learning undertaken by adults after a gap following completion of their initial education. (UGC, 1984).

UGC and NAB urged that continuing education become as central a concern of higher education institutions as undergraduate teaching and

research. They elaborated the economic, social, professional development and leisure needs that justified such a development. Whereas the Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963) had emphasised the need for higher education courses to be, "available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so," the UGC and NAB working parties changed this to those who have the "ability to benefit." (NAB, 1984; UGC, 1984) With this shift of emphasis, the potential for more adults to enter higher education without conventional A and O levels was established.

I also reviewed the different meanings and debates surrounding the concept of 'lifelong education', which now had a new relevance to institutions of higher education. As Knapper and Cropley (1985) pointed out, debates about lifelong education raise questions about the goals of education, the procedures for meeting these goals and the values operating within institutions to determine which goals and which procedures were to be given priority. (p. 17):

"Lifelong education thus defines a set of organisational, administrative, methodological and procedural measures which accept the importance of promoting lifelong learning." (Knapper and Cropley, 1985, p. 18)

What excited me at the time, as I reviewed the different strands of the literature relating to access within the context of broader debates about continuing and lifelong education, was the emphasis throughout on the need for formal learning contexts to become more responsive to lifelong learners. Adult learners were regarded as a client group with diverse needs, who would differ from traditional age students, and therefore make new demands. Throughout this literature there was an emphasis on the need for changes at all levels, if the system was to attract and keep as students adults who 'had the ability to benefit' from higher education, but who, by virtue of their age, as well as their life and work experience, their gender, race, and/or class, had remained previously been under-represented in the system.

I came across Chickering's 1981 landmark volume, Modern American College; Responding to the new realities for diverse students and a

changing society. Herein he, and a number of writers, report on the various strands of research and theorising that had become relevant to these new directions in higher education, given the challenges posed by a more heterogeneous and outspoken body of students. Chickering and his associates plead eloquently and forcefully for,

"...institutions [to] devise alternatives to meet the needs of diverse students. This means that each teacher, administrator, and student personnel professional will have to give much more thought to the persons being educated than in the past. We will thus need an increased working knowledge about human characteristics that influence learning. Such knowledge can help us better understand the kinds of heterogeneity that will maximize learning through peer interaction in our classes and our campuses. It also will help us tailor curriculums and educational practices to particular individual needs." (1981, p. 7)

Knowles also speaks of the challenges likely to be posed by growing number of adults in higher education institutions:

"... people who have been working in the education of adults...have known for a long time that they had to violate some of the assumptions and concepts of pedagogy if they were to help - and keep- their students. But they have felt guilty because it meant departing from accepted academic standards. In the last decade, however, their guilt feelings have begun to disappear, largely because there has been emerging a new coherent, comprehensive, body of theory and technology based on assumptions about adults as learners. Thus, they are getting a respectable rationale for doing what they have known all along would result in better learning. " (Knowles, 1978, p. 54)

The values of more progressive approaches to education were also the concerns of people such as Tony Becher (1975), David Warren Piper (1981) Jean Ruddock (1978) and Donald Bligh (1971, 1982) , who now, in a sense, were my colleagues - as co- staff developers. I discovered that they too, for a very long time, had been concerned with a shift from,

"the traditional 'apprenticeship' model of university education (in which the scholar worked alongside the master of an academic craft) to the emergent 'consumer service' model (in which the institution strives to provide a varied educational diet which more accurately reflects the personal requirements of its clientele." (Becher, 1975., p. 190)

These arguments, in which I was now immersed due to my work at the Centre, seemed increasingly relevant to working with a new clientele in a less elitist higher education system. The notions of 'learners' and 'learning' were gaining new currency in the changing social context.

These were languages with which I could identify. The realities of the changing social context which was certain to bring about changes in higher education, and the influences of others who were concerned to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, were ones with which I had long been concerned - in the U.S. and the U.K. They increased my confidence in the validity of the kinds of teaching and learning processes in which I had been engaging outside the formal system. The very people whom institutions were now being pressured to attract were those with whom I had worked outside the educational system.

This reading helped to reassure me that the questions arising from my own life and work experience had direct relevance to new issues within British higher education. For I, like people such as Chickering and his associates, was centrally concerned to learn more about the needs of new and previously under-represented learners - not just in terms of their experience as returners to higher education, but also in terms of their experience outside it. A study along the lines I was proposing was likely to be of relevance and use to a British higher education system in this country that, like in the U.S., was likely to move eventually away from an elite to a mass system of higher education.

4. Adults as learners outside formal education

In my own experience as an educator, who had worked in higher education as well as within professional and community organisations, I was well aware of the extent to which continuing education and training were being emphasised generally, outside higher education. Moreover, I had had the experience of designing and running courses based on Knowles, Kolb and Rogerian principles, building on ideas for professional development that had come from the U.S. I was conscious of

the growing influence of 'human potential' movement, stemming largely from the original work of Rogers (1969, 1983). Significant numbers of courses were on offer by, for example, professional associations, community groups, and employers generally, within voluntary, as well as private and public sector organisations. I thus believed that more and more adult learners were experiencing alternative conceptions of teaching and learning in practice. For me, this meant courses that were more learner and dialogue-centred, experiential, and responsive to adults' needs.

I believed that, if responsiveness was to become an issue within higher education, it was important to know whether adults entering higher education after a break since completing their initial education, had had alternative experiences of teaching and learning methods, course participation and course designs in different settings. If so, what influence had these had on the interpretative frameworks they used to make sense of their experiences of higher education? I believed that such perspectives would be invaluable, particularly should more adults enter higher education.

If this were to be my focus, I was concerned to 'prove' that my 'working hypothesis' was indeed sound. In other words, was alternative learning on the increase and was this exposing adults to alternative approaches? This particular strand of reading was guided by this question.

One of the first publications I came across on this subject was a book by Charles Wedemeyer, the title of which immediately attracted me: Learning at the Back Door: Reflections on Non-traditional learning in the Lifespan. (1981). Wedemeyer wrestles with the notion of non-traditional learning throughout the human lifespan, and explores its implications for educational practice. Although his preoccupations are with the application of distance education and educational technology to adults' learning needs, he too emphasises learner-centredness and non-traditional approaches for employers and higher education institutions wishing to keep pace in a society characterised by rapid change.

Most importantly, Wedemeyer offers a 'state of the art' review of developments which both resonated with, and increased my confidence in, the relevance of my own experience and thinking. He also poses a question which had a significant impact on my belief in the significance of my study:

"Is there a theoretical base in lifespan and nontraditional learning from which ideas for research, experimentation and innovation can be derived to guide institutional change and development?" (Wedemeyer, 1981, p. 5)

Wedemeyer's question excited me; his book also led me to a developing literature that drew attention to the kinds, and significance of, the learning in which adults were engaging outside formal education systems. At first, I tended to conceptualise such learning as that which referred to,

"the many deliberate educational enterprises set up outside the educational system e.g. by other ministries or departments (health, agriculture and others) or by agencies with primary objectives to which education is subordinate (churches, trade unions and others)" (Groombridge, 1983. p. 6)

Through this book, I learned about the work of Allen Tough (1979, 1971, 1968) who, for a decade, had been concerned with sustained learning activities of adults outside educational institutions. His research focus was the 'major learning effort' (previously and simultaneously called the 'learning project'): in other words, deliberate self-managed learning. Tough's use of the term 'deliberate' refers to the person's effort to gain and retain knowledge or skill, or to change in some way through a series of episodes (minimum of 7 hours within a six month period) as well as a primary intention to learn. (p. 9) He thus distinguishes the learning project from 'other directed' learning, such as that which would occur within nonformal education, and 'informal' or incidental learning: that which occurs by chance, not intention, in the course of an adult's life and work experience.

Tough, like Johnstone and Rivera (1965) in their large scale survey before him, found that the extent of independent adult learning taking place outside institutions was considerable and varied. For

example, in Tough's 1970 study, of largely middle class adults, 66 adults had undertaken 538 learning projects over the previous year. Two thirds had been planned by the learner him or herself. All but three adults had conducted at least one self planned project. In other words, learners were taking primary responsibility for organising their learning, and were making use of human and institutional resources on their own terms. The mean number of self planned projects per person was 5.8. Only 1/5 of the projects entailed a paid person or an institution, and were undertaken for credit.

Tough consistently encountered a de-valuing of such learning activity by the individuals involved. Brookfield (1980) however, one of the British team, indicates that the interview itself led to the person putting an increased value on such activity. Tough predicted that attitudes towards self-managed learning would significantly change generally by the 1990's, by which time he believed this area would have become a growing focus for research and theorising. He suggested that there was a disproportionate focus on the 'tip of the iceberg', the 20% of adult learning taking place within institutions in North America. He believed that the remaining 80% raised critical issues about adult learning generally, and significantly challenged the largely institutionalised conceptions of adult learning that informed much research and theory.

Tough's studies of adults' learners projects generated quantitative and qualitative data, but were essentially small scale, and exploratory, using structured interviews.

It was evident from the growing body of literature in this area that Tough's research was seen as seminal and had had a tremendous impact on a number of adult educators. I personally also found it tremendously exciting, since he had significantly expanded my own thinking about learning 'outside formal education'. In addition, I began to re-consider the value of my own 'non-traditional learning', managed by myself with the assistance of mentors, groups in the community and books in the course of my work, over the previous decade.

I believe that Tough's work resonated not just with me but with many others in North America and Australia, because his notion of 'self-directedness' was seen to connect directly with Rogers' and Knowles' key assumptions in relation to learner-centred education and andragogy. Respecting and promoting self-directedness was increasingly becoming associated with normative practice in group adult learning and training outside formal education. (e.g. Knowles, 1984). Rogers also, upon whose ideas Knowles drew heavily, had long stressed the primacy of the learner's personal frame of reference as the starting point for learning:

"Learning is facilitated when the student participates responsibly in the learning process. When he chooses his own direction, help to discover his own learning resources, formulates his own problems, decides his own courses of action, lives with the consequences of these choices, then significant learning is maximised." (Rogers 1969)

Research into self-managed learning outside formal institutions was also in step with wider cultural and social attitudes arising from the effect of the sixties when challenges to the power of educational institutions were posed. Illich, long a critic of formal education, and others, were questioning the right of educators to, "tell society what must be learned, and [who are] in a position to write off as valueless what has been learned outside of school." (1977)

Tough's work set in motion a chain of developments, well ahead of his prediction for the 1990's, in two spheres. The first of these was in learner-centred, small-scale exploratory studies, that incorporated some measure of self-reflection on one's own experience. People like Brookfield (1980, 1981, 1983), who also researched self-directed adult learning, took his approach even further. Brookfield speaks about his excitement when he discovered that a PhD need not be based on a survey and questionnaires, but rather on a small sample, with no "pretence that the [...] learners chosen were statistically representative of any larger population. (1983, p. 145) He adds that "accuracy and precision in recording and interpreting data" (ibid), as modelled by Tough, was essential, however. Places like the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where Tough worked, also began to attract growing numbers of adult educators, working outside the system, as PhD

students seeking to conduct qualitative research based on learner experience - most of which work remained unpublished until 1987 (Boud and Griffin, 1987)

Secondly, Tough was regarded as the key figure in drawing attention for the first time to the , "huge and heretofore unnoticed or undocumented phenomenon of adults planning and initiating their own learning projects. " (Griffin, 1978, p. 7). His work spawned a great deal of further research and theoretical speculation, much sooner than he had predicted. For example, twenty additional studies were reported by Tough in the second edition of his book. The patterns that Tough reported, about how enthusiastically and how often people set out to learn on their own initiative, tended to be upheld (e.g. Penland, 1977, 1979; Strong, 1977; Brookfield, 1980, 1983).

This kind of research, within the context of the influence of Knowles and Rogers, and the social movements of the sixties, helped to justify arguments for increasing non-traditional and independent study opportunities in U.S. higher education (e.g. Ruyle and Geiselman, 1974; Cross, 1971, 1979, 1981) Furthermore, this interrelated stream of thinking on adult learning gave rise to CAEL, (the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning, now 'for Adult and Experiential Learning). CAEL led the way in establishing procedures and pilot projects whereby learning from life and work experience was being assessed and accredited, as a basis for entry to, and exemption from, higher education courses (e.g. Keeton and Tate, 1978).

Although such influences in Britain were more limited, a point noted by Brookfield with some concern (1981), nonetheless reverberations across the Atlantic were in evidence. For example, the CAEL initiative was picked up in this country, as concerns about the demographic decline in the number of 18 year olds grew (e.g. DES, 1978) Norman Evans (1980, 1981), a major proponent of this growing area of interest within British higher education, also has served to focus the attention of higher education institutions on the extent and value of learning outside the system:

"...a considerable amount of active, purposeful and deliberate learning is now a characteristic of a very large proportion of the individual members of our society, and much of this learning is anything but trivial." (Evans, 1981, p. 6)

These various developments, related to learning outside institutions, connected with, and enlarged, my own understandings. They felt highly relevant at the beginning of the study, and sharpened my focus and preoccupations. My literature search in relation to learning outside formal education had revealed that firstly, there was a great deal of learning activity taking place outside formal education. Secondly, the study of this learning was raising issues about the responses of higher education to adult learners.

I was encouraged by Groombridge's assertion that, "some of the most interesting and urgent issues [about adult learning] hinge on the relations between the formal system" and nonformal and informal education. (1983). In addition, Cropley and Knapper (1985) argued that formal or institutionalised learning settings should,

- "1. be recognised as comprising only a portion of the total spectrum of educational influences.
 2. acknowledge the importance of learning occurring outside the formal education system.
 3. be more open to interaction with everyday learning influences."
- (p. 38-9)

They suggest that the domains of non-institutionalised and institutionalised educational influences need to be seen as a continuum.

My conception of 'learning outside the system' had been significantly expanded to include self-directed learning. Through my study I was now concerned to learn more about adults' learning activities generally outside formal education - within organised group learning and training initiatives as well as those that were self-managed. Moreover, although Tough and others had convinced me of the extent and significance of such learning, my research interest was not with the quantity, content, quality, organisation or competencies associated with such learning: evident preoccupations in the literature. Instead, I wanted to explore how adults interpreted the meaning and implications of alternative forms and processes of lifelong learning,

in relation to their experiences within formal learning contexts and of returning to higher education.

For the purposes of this study the term 'formal learning context' is used to refer particularly to primary, secondary and tertiary education, the latter including further and higher education. Lifelong learning, however, refers to the totality of a learner's experiences within and outside formal learning contexts. This particular focus - on meanings for learning associated with these various domains and modes - was nowhere evident in the literature.

5. Learner experience studies within higher education institutions

The third strand of reading which influenced and focused my research concerns at this stage related to studies being undertaken into learner experience within higher education settings. I learned of these studies through my involvement in programmes at the Centre for Staff Development in Higher Education.

To the best of my knowledge, William Perry can probably be credited with pioneering this research direction in higher education, in the English speaking world. Perry, a student counsellor at Harvard, first became interested in the ways in which students give meaning to their educational experience, when he invited them to evaluate a course he offered on 'Strategies of Reading' with two open-ended questions: "What did you expect of this course?" (big space) and "What did you find?" (big space) (1959). Intrigued by the very different and thoroughly unexpected interpretations arising from this evaluation exercise, he became interested in what else he might learn about students' ways of 'making meaning' over the course of their undergraduate programme. In 1964, he and a research team of other counsellors and teachers, began to investigate the experiences of seventeen university undergraduate men, at the end of each of their four years at Harvard. They began with an open-ended question like, 'What has stood out for you this year?', and then encouraged the students to talk freely. (1970) Two follow up studies, conducted similarly with a total of seventy students in 1962 and 1973, led

Perry to conclude that a scheme of development was in evidence across the accounts. Across the various accounts, he identified nine particular positions, between which particular patterns of transition operate. Each of these have meaning in relation to students' conceptions of knowledge, the role of authorities, and their role and responsibility as learners.

My own summary of this research is offered here:

"[Perry] suggests that students enter higher education assuming clear answers and absolute truths. The experience of higher education at Harvard is meant to expose students to the contextual and relativistic nature of knowledge, and this in turn leads to a dismantling of dualistic conceptions of knowledge." (Weil, 1988)

In the later stages of Perry's scheme, the emphasis is on students taking greater responsibility for their own learning: in other words, the 'self-directedness' notion once again surfaces. Perry, and others, have also suggested that few students now enter higher education below position five, at which point conceptions of knowledge have become essentially relativistic.

Voice 2: Early on in my study, I had the opportunity to meet Perry, and participate in a seminar he ran, where he spoke about his research. Prior to that I had only a superficial familiarity with his general ideas. To this day I remember my excitement during that seminar when I heard him speak about 'meaning' and 'students making sense'. This kind of research had accessed that meaning and had challenged status quo conceptions about the nature of student experience of higher education. At the time of our meeting, I was also engaged in the epistemological journey described in Chapter 2 - and although I did not yet appreciate the wider paradigmatic implications of his research, I immediately was in tune with what he was talking about. I remember being struck by how his research 'lived' and how the many quotes he used from the interviews within the seminar spoke to me at such a direct and personally meaningful level. The many threads of what he was offering me, as a person, as a researcher, as an educator and counsellor deeply concerned with his own personal sense making about his relationships with students, were still elusive. I went to read more of his writing after this seminar, and became affirmed that the process of what he did was absolutely relevant to what I felt I needed to do. I was uncertain as to if and how the content of his scheme related to my concerns. But one particular quotation stood out for me from the page - a passage that as the study progressed, was to have increasingly greater meaning, in terms of reflections on my own 'learning life history' and in terms of some of the things that continually seemed to be at issue for participants in my research:

"It is now clear to me that a teacher's confirmatory offering of community is necessary even in the highest reaches of development. Here, where both formal logic and even 'reflective probabilistic judgement' fail to support the tensions of life's paradoxes, the student's development is at risk. Even if students do achieve a sense of irony, it may drift into a bitter alienation." (Perry, 1981, p. 109)

The value of studies which incorporate learners' perspectives began to be established during the 1970's when curricular innovations became the focus of evaluation studies. For example, Malcolm Parlett and David Hamilton spoke about 'illuminative evaluation' (e.g. Hamilton, 1977; Parlett and Hamilton, 1972, 1981). The central thesis in their methodological argument was that the field of education research has been dominated by the pervasive influence of a,

"research tradition based on the theory and methods of mental testing, and 'field' experimentation, of the kind predominantly used by agricultural botanists...Within this tradition, curriculum evaluation is regarded as rather like the comparison of two varieties of compost. Students - rather like plant crops - are given pre-tests (the seedlings are weighed or measured) and then submitted to different experiences (treatment conditions). Subsequently, after a period of time, their attainment (growth or yield) is measured to indicate the relative efficiency of the methods (fertilisers) used. Studies of this kind are designed to yield data of one particular type, i.e. 'objective numerical data that permit statistical analyses." (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972,, p. 7)

The agricultural-botany approach neglects processes for outcomes:

"An agricultural-botany evaluator is rather like a critic who reviews a production on the basis of the script and applause meter readings, having missed the performance. " (ibid, p. 22)

Parlett and Hamilton argued in favour of a 'social anthropology' approach which requires "new suppositions, concepts and terminology." (1972) This work not only signified the gaps in the literature arising from a failure to take account of learners' perspectives; it also began to raise epistemological and methodological questions for me in a more central way - the subject of Chapter 2.

In addition, this work was the first I had come across that spoke to my interests in 'learning contexts'. Parlett and Hamilton spoke about how studies of curriculum innovations from learners' perspectives gave rise to a far more complex picture than the traditional one about the

influence of the 'learning milieu' on the quality of learning. They saw this one as,

".. a network or nexus of cultural, social, institutional and psychological variables. These interact in complicated ways to produce, in each class or course, a unique pattern of circumstances, pressures, customs, opinions and work-styles which suffuse the teaching and learning that occur there. The configuration of the learning milieu...depends on the interplay of numerous different factors. " (1972, p. 11)

They also argue that,

"discovering much more about the experiences of education has potential theoretical consequences of great significance. The official terminology is replete with words such as learning, motivation, intelligence and teaching and would soon be shown as utterly deficient. Learning, for instance, has many different aspects, means and levels. (1981, p. 145)

In Sweden and at Lancaster, research was also being undertaken into students' conceptions of learning and approaches to academic tasks. Marton, and his colleagues in Goteborg (Svenson and Saljo) and people such as Dai Hounsell, Diana Laurillard, Paul Ramsden and Noel Entwistle in this country were developing their own forms of qualitative methodology (e.g. Marton et al; Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Elton and Laurillard, 1979). This body of research was essentially concerned with using students' perspectives, "as a way of developing a new conceptualization of learning in higher education." (Entwistle, 1984, p. 1) :

"The new research paradigm switches perspective and so provides insights for the teacher which are not only firmly rooted in real-life situations in higher education, but are also more illuminating. They present a description of student learning from an *unusual perspective* - that of the student." (Entwistle, 1984, emphasis added)

The overall focus of these studies was on "what students learn and how that learning takes place" (Entwistle, 1984). Their emphasis was on academic activities, such as reading, interpreting and demonstrating understanding of material. Nonetheless, by focusing on learner experience and learner interpretations, new questions about learning and higher education were being raised.

The Lancaster research was also raising specific questions about the influence of different kinds of learning contexts (in this case, different kinds of departments) on the quality of student learning. For example, student capability and motivation, beyond a certain level, were seen to have insufficient explanatory power with regard to student performance. Whereas Perry would suggest that a stage of development might be at work, and at odds with what expectations and assumptions were operating in that context, those researchers suggested that departmental expectations and assessment procedures were seen to have a significant influence on whether 'surface' or 'deep learning' occurred:

"The evidence is overwhelming that the quality of student learning is adversely affected by inappropriate assessment methods, poor teaching, and the lack of freedom provided by some courses. Yet the detrimental effects may not be visible in the outcomes of conventional assessments, as 'success' is defined by the criteria adopted by the staff." (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983, p. 208)

What was at issue for me in the early stages of my reading, was that further validity had been lent to my own concerns that learning needed to be considered as a complex process. I was beginning to conceptualise this more clearly, as involving the interaction of learner and context, rather than the individual alone. I was more interested in generalised notions of and meanings for learning, as indicated earlier, than in academic tasks. But the cumulative impact of this body of research, combined with the growing influence of Perry's work (1970, 1981) put 'meaning' at issue. Moreover, these new various researchers were simultaneously breaking new methodological ground in cognitive psychology and educational research. Perhaps most importantly, these studies helped to demonstrate how entirely different understandings about learner experience and learner conceptions of learning can arise, when learners', rather than teachers' meanings, are explored.

6. Mature Students

The fourth strand of research I reviewed at this stage was that related to adults returning to higher education. Studies in this area

contrasted sharply with the tenor of the research on learner experience.

What stands out is the extent to which studies of mature students, but also of adult learning generally, tend to reflect the experience of white middle-class Americans. Brookfield (1986) summarises the patterns I encountered in my review at this stage:

"In research into adult learning, the adults who form the sampling frames are for the most part ethnically homogeneous; that is, they are Caucasian Americans. They are also drawn chiefly from middle-class or upwardly mobile working-class families, since this is the foremost clientele of continuing education programmes. To base a comprehensive theory of adult learning on observations of white, middle-class Americans in continuing or extension education classes in the post-Second World War era is conceptually and empirically naive. It is, admittedly, cumbersome to preface every comment regarding adult learning theory with a caveat concerning the cultural and class specificity of one's sample and hence, the limited generalizability of one's conclusions. Nonetheless, we fall far too frequently into the mistake of declaring that research reveals that adults, in a generic sense, learn in a certain way. " (1986, p. 32)

Osborne, Charnley and Withnall (1984) in their comprehensive and updated review of existing research in adult and continuing education in relation to mature students, (Osborne et al, 1984; see all Charnley et al, 1980) concludes that these patterns, "apply with equal force to research conducted in the United Kingdom." (p. 1)

Their working definition of mature student was,

"any student over the age of twenty-one years, who had completed his or her initial stage of formal education and who returned after a gap of at least three years to an extended programme of structured learning. " (p. 3)

I too decided to adopt this working definition as this excellent review reflected the dominant preoccupations I had also found in the literature. For example, a significant number of studies provided descriptive statistics as to numbers and location of mature students, reflecting a concern with participation rates and patterns. These supported my view that opportunities for learning were increasing for

mature students and that growing numbers were taking advantage of them. But what I found most interesting in research on attitudes to participation was the pursuit of a line of inquiry arising from my own experience of working with working class women who had largely negative attitudes towards education. The results of the U.K. ACACE survey (1982) suggested that attitudes towards continuing education were shown to be, "strongly and systematically related to social class." Subjects were asked to respond to positive statements about education, (e.g. 'Education is important to me as a means of getting ahead in the world', 'Self-improvement is important to me and I work hard at it') and more negative statements (e.g. 'I don't go much for self-improvement: I just let myself be what I am' 'I was very unhappy at school'). When mean scores by social class were analysed for men and women (N=1096 and 1252 respectively), a striking pattern emerged:

"The four positive statements above the line attract most agreement from those up the social scale, while the less positive statements below the line attract most agreement from those down the class scale." (ACACE, 1982, p. 42)

This survey raised some questions for me about the 'universal characteristic' of self-directedness attributed to adults by Knowles and Rogers. I was also intrigued to learn that more women than men, across social groups, were unhappy at school.

What I found equally interesting in the ACACE survey were the responses to the question about 'likelihood of taking up education as an adult if entitlement existed.' When the question focused on them as people, rather than a generalised attitude, in response to a scale ranging from, 'Very likely' to 'Definitely not' and 'Do not know', even more striking patterns by social class and age emerged. (Women and men were comparable in their reaction.) For example, only 6% of 130 women in Social Class E (households at the lowest level of subsistence) considered themselves 'very likely' to take up an entitlement as compared with 31% in the middle class group; 19% out of 342 in Social Class D (semi skilled/unskilled working class) (p. 49)

The researchers concluded,

"While the majority of people hold positive attitudes to education, there is a hard core among the working class of both sexes who were unhappy at school, and who believe that education is not important to them personally. Among the majority who do care about it, the men are more interested in education as a means of getting on in the world, while the women look at it for its own sake. ..About half of the adults surveyed say they would be interested in taking up an entitlement to education. " (ACACE, 1982, p. 50-51)

Other preoccupations in the British literature were with the different percentages of mature students in the universities (average 6%) as compared with the polytechnics and colleges (average 25%) (e.g. Wood, 1982; Hoggart et al, 1982); the largely middle class constituency attracted to the Open University (e.g. McIntosh, 1976) and the barriers that were seen to obstruct increased participation by mature students (e.g. Smithers and Griffin, 1986; Elsey, 1978, 1982). The latter includes attitudes (within higher education itself); finance, admission/selection procedures, limited opportunities for part time and modular study, as well as credit transfer. (e.g. Fulton, 1981) Hoggart, et al; ACACE, 1982; Jones and Williams, 1979; Tight, 1983; Squires, 1981). There was an overall concern that,

"...the majority of mature students in both polytechnics and universities come from a broadly similar social class background to that of conventional students but are slightly less advanced in various respects. " (Charnley, et al, 1984, drawing on Hopper and Osborn, 1975; Elsey, 1982)

I found such literature fascinating, given the barriers I had personally encountered in 1974 when I wished to become a mature student. I did not see it, however, as directly relevant to my emergent concerns except with regard to how these barriers were likely to combine with perceptions of education to maintain a ceiling on the participation rates of certain groups.

But overall, the research reported in relation to mature students was full of concern about academic staff attitudes, and the changes that would be required, at structural and practice levels, as indicated previously in my reading on access and continuing education generally.

With regard to issues related to teaching and learning, there was little research within the vein I reported in the previous section.

Most preoccupations were with reasons for returning to study and general motivations and orientations with regard to studying. For example, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) conducted a survey of 2000 American adults, and suggested that adults tended to return to higher education when they were undergoing some kind of major transition in their lives, such as in terms of career and personal circumstances.

Throughout this literature, there was a small but growing emphasis on 'special needs' and 'special groups', with a particular focus on women. Family conflicts and the need for educational guidance, counselling, child/day care provision, emotional support and financial aid were themes I continually encountered.

Finally, an implicit and explicit assumption predominated across this literature on mature students, in keeping with my discussion of access and continuing education in Section 4: that more learner-centred, progressive teaching and learning approaches were essential should the numbers of mature students in higher education increase. The 'general characteristics' of adult learners were often cited in support of this, with self-directedness as a dominant concern (e.g. Cross, 1981; Ruyle and Geiselman, 1974; Smith, 1983; Rogers, 1977; Tight, 1983). In fact, Jarvis even challenged the Open University, which in Britain had a high reputation in terms of responsiveness to mature students, regarding the extent to which andragogical principles were genuinely reflected in Open University teaching and learning materials and approaches. (Jarvis, 1981)

Overall, however, accounts of adult learners' interpretations of their own actual experiences of being a mature student, as opposed to educators and academic researchers' interpretations of their experiences, were virtually non-existent. The latter group's view predetermined what was put at issue, in academic theory and research, and more specifically, what was asked in surveys, interview schedules and questionnaires. Moreover, a traditional quantitative methodology predominated in these studies, with a few exceptions. For example, Elsey (1982) and Challis (1976) had used semi-structured interviews. The only exceptions seemed to be those conducted within the remit of the Goteborg and Lancaster research.

For example, at Goteborg, Saljo (1979) had surfaced five qualitatively different conceptions of learning in an interview study with adults. He asked them what learning meant to them:

- 1) a quantitative increase in knowledge
- 2) memorising
- 3) the acquisition of facts, methods, etc which can be retained and used when necessary
- 4) the abstraction of meaning
- 5) an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality.

(Saljo, 1979)

Although no details about what Saljo meant by adults, were given - in the Goteborg research the term 'adult' is also used to refer to 18 - 21 year old undergraduate students - nonetheless, a very different direction and outcome is suggested from previously cited studies of mature students. In other words, he was trying to access their interpretations, and their meanings about learning.

Equally, the work of Gibbs, Morgan and Taylor (1984) was within this new methodological vein. Although their focus stemmed from a dominant theme in the literature cited above - that of educational motivation/orientation - they introduced the notion of 'world view' in relation to students' experiences of learning. They regarded this as,

"a series of interrelated concepts which describe learning at increasing levels of generality. At the most general level there is the personal context for studying, that is a student's aims, values and purposes for study. We shall call this a student's *educational orientation*. The experience of learning also depends on the institutional context - the way in which a particular educational institution operates, with its norms, values and traditions, and its particular procedures for teaching and assessment. And the institutional context, as we have seen affects the lower level concepts describing the students' experiences of specific learning activities - learning approaches and outcomes. " (1984, p. 165)

The study of these researchers was conducted with Open University adult students, and once again affirmed the complexity of the dimensions that can be surfaced when adults are free to define their

own meanings, rather than being constricted within a framework of meaning pre-determined by the researcher. This kind of research acknowledged complexities relating to the issues with which I was preoccupied, even though it did not address my specific concerns.

7. Four strands of literature: Taking stock

My wide-ranging perusal of the literature led me to conclude generally that my own research interests were indeed valid, and responsive to a number of significant gaps in the literature on mature students and adult learning:

- the lack of studies concerning influences of lifelong learning, (including that which mature students had experienced outside formal learning contexts) on how they made sense of themselves as learners;
- the gap relating to mature students' own accounts of their actual experiences, of teaching and learning and being learners, within higher education institutions
- the dominant influence of white middle class American assumptions, perceptions and understandings in constructions of adults as learners and adult learning.

Finally, my interest in the impact of progressive and traditional teaching approaches was validated by the extent to which this emphasis was reflected in the literature about the responsiveness of higher education to adult learners. What made my study distinctive, however, was that I planned to investigate how and whether these influences affected adults who had been away from formal learning contexts and then returned, eventually to higher education.

This literature review around four key strands demonstrated that there were few studies that spoke to me directly about the concerns arising from my own life and work experience. Certainly in the literature on mature students, there were few attempts to engage with the issues emerging from the 'illuminative evaluation', meaning-oriented and learner centred research cited in Section 5. Although in this study I was not concerned specifically with how students approached academic tasks, I nonetheless was interested in students' conceptions of learning, and the interpretative frameworks through

which adults gave meaning to their educational experience. My preoccupations seemed far more analogous to those of writers concerned with learner experience than those who had been involved in mature student research.

8. Methodological enigmas and the beginning of another journey

During my period of literature review, I came across the following passage by Entwistle (1984):

" quantitative methods imply reductionism and the use of formal or mechanical models which embody assumptions about chains of causality. In contrast the alternative paradigm involves approaches to research rooted in phenomenology which derive from a direct exploration of students' experiences of learning. The traditional research paradigm involves explaining student behaviour from the outside, as a detached, objective observer. The alternative approach seeks an empathetic understanding of what is involved in student learning derived from students' descriptions of what learning means to them. It involves a shift not just of methodology, but of perspective. " (1984, p. 13)

My reflection on my own experience, and my reading in the early stages of my study, had left me encouraged by those who were talking explicitly about meaning, and had been the pioneers in making qualitative research into learners' experience respectable within the higher education literature. It had also left me puzzled by how different approaches seemed to surface entirely different kinds of issues and conceptions of learning.

My reading in these areas had suggested that the role of the educational researcher was being re-considered, and self report, participant observation, case study, and depth interviewing - process oriented methods (familiar to me from my work in clinical areas and in education) were becoming acceptable as a means of studying complex human and social processes, and the 'making of meaning'. These things were simultaneously an affirming revelation and a source of confusion. They did not tally with the 'image' of research which dominated in the academic setting in which I had been a student and was now working. I felt vulnerable, both as a mature student who had been away from Higher Education, studying within a traditional psychology department where alternative methodologies were still

suspect, and working as an academic member of staff in the same institution. A number of fundamental questions had been raised for me, which I felt compelled to make sense of at this stage of the research. Thus, the second strand of my preliminary reading was set in motion, as were the beginnings of a process from which entirely new levels of meaning would emerge.

Voice 2: The nature of the research I was to undertake and the epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpinned it (as discussed in Chapter 2) ensured that the life and work experience, with which I began this chapter, become as much the focus of critical reflection as the experiences of other adult learners. It was to be a very long time before I would be able to see, for example, how and why my experience of changing countries and not continuing my post-graduate studies as planned was in fact quite germane to my being able to hear and understand some of the issues that were to arise from the study. But this dimension in the web of connectedness, with my own story, was not clear to me in the beginning.

As I recall this stage, I am reminded of a 'new paradigm research' joke that I was to hear three years later:

"Who was that research I saw you with last night? That wasn't my research. That was my life!" (Reason and Rowan, 1981).

The interweaving paths of discovery on which I was embarking were to lead to struggle, confusion and despair. Not being able to see around corners, I could not see how also they were to lead to a great deal more awareness about myself, as well as about adults as learners and learning, about epistemology, and about how in academic institutions, we can unwittingly do violence to the interrelatedness of these dimensions, and thereby the complexity of our own and learners' lived experience.

But I anticipate the story which, at this stage, had only just begun...

CHAPTER TWO

AN EVOLVING EPISTEMOLOGY

1. The emerging question: a qualitative research approach?

My review of certain aspects of the literature on adults learning, and a reflexive re-examination of my own experience, as outlined in Chapter 1, caused me to conclude in the early stages of my embarking upon this study that different approaches to, and different assumptions about, research result in different outcomes.

I had formulated my research question thus:

What are the dominant themes and concerns arising from the situation of adults returning to formal learning contexts after a break of some years, and how are these influenced by prior learning experiences within and outside the education system?

I realised that the qualitative studies of, for example, Perry (1970, 1981), Tough (1979) and Brookfield (1980), the Lancaster and Swedish groups (1984, 1987), and developments in evaluation studies (e.g. Patton, 1981; Parlett and Hamilton, 1972;) had resulted in new formulations of basic questions about learning, learners learning, and about the interaction of learner and context. To date, there had been very little research on lifelong learning and none on its influence on adults' transitions to formal education based on learners' perspectives. It seemed to me that a pre-determined hypothesis would be inappropriate and premature, given the complexities and newness of the issues I wished ^{to} explore. At this stage, therefore, a qualitative approach seemed most relevant to my study.

2. From questions of methodology to questions of epistemology

I have called this chapter, 'an evolving epistemology' to emphasise how, although I began with questions of methodology, I became centrally concerned with the complex interrelationship between the

kinds of tacit assumptions and presuppositions - what Bateson refers to as our 'perception determining beliefs' (Bateson, 1972, p. vii) - that underpin the different realities asserted to be 'true' in education and psychology. I began a review of relevant literature simply with questions about which *methods* might be appropriate to the issue which I wanted to subject to a disciplined inquiry. But questions which I regarded as far more fundamental and critical soon emerged for me, once I made sense of qualitative methodology in the context of post-positivism (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and 'new paradigm research' (Reason and Rowan, 1981; Reason, 1988). In turn, resulting insights led me to a deeper consideration of issues of gender in relation to methodology and greater clarity about my personal stance (Salmon, 1989) as a researcher.

I use the term 'epistemology' in the sense of Gregory Bateson, to also incorporate the notion of ontology:

"In the natural history of the living human being [as opposed to in philosophy] , ontology [beliefs about the nature of reality] and epistemology [how we know what we know] cannot be separated. His [*sic*] (*commonly unconscious*) *beliefs* about what sort of world it is will determine how he sees it and acts within it, and his ways of perceiving and acting will determine his beliefs about its nature. The living man is thus bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which - regardless of ultimate truth or falsity - become partially self-validating for him.

"It is awkward to refer constantly to both epistemology and ontology and incorrect to suggest that they are separable in human natural history. There seems to be no convenient word to cover the combination of these two concepts...what is important is a body of habitual assumptions or premises implicit in the relationship between man and environment and that these premises may be true or false. I shall therefore use the single term, 'epistemology'...to cover both aspects of the net of premises which govern adaptation (or maladaptation) to the human and physical environment. In George Kelly's vocabulary, there are the rules by which an individual 'construes' his experience. " (Bateson, 1972, p. 314)

3. Stages in my epistemological journey

3.1. Introduction

This thesis is as much a documentation of how I made sense of the journey of the research, as it is of its process and findings. The journey was operating on several levels simultaneously. In this chapter, I focus explicitly on my epistemological sensemaking, showing how my understanding of methodological issues has been clarified, and re-structured by this journey. In the next chapter I focus on my conduct of what became a cyclical inquiry. In Part II, I demonstrate other levels of sense making, in relation to the development and presentation of the final analysis.

In retrospect, I can regard my 'epistemological journey' as being characterised by four stages:

- a) Qualitative methodology: a review of literature in education, psychology and sociology;
- b) Getting started: my discovery of grounded theory.
- c) Discovering post-positivism: a new conceptual framework for making sense of epistemological and methodological issues
- d) Finding and sustaining a voice: a continuing journey

3.2. Qualitative methodology: a review of literature

The first stage in my epistemological journey was dominated by a concern to investigate whether my tentative conclusion that a qualitative approach was most relevant, based on my initial literature review and formulation of my research question, was appropriate? I reviewed literature in relation to the use of qualitative methodologies in sociology, psychology and education. Here I summarise only the broad contours of that review,

I began with sociological literature, which enabled me to re-discover earlier influences on my thinking in America, such as the Chicago School and social anthropology. I realised how I had tacitly absorbed the influences of people like Becker and Blumer. They put meaning and

perceptions at the core of theoretical development. Reality was not conceived as something tangible 'out there', firm and fast across time and place, but rather as something which can only be understood within specific contexts of meaning. There were many in sociology who had challenged the notion that only traditional ways of doing research yielded valid knowledge:

"...inside of the 'scientific protocol' one can operate unwittingly with false premises, erroneous problems, distorted data, spurious relations, inaccurate concepts, and unverified interpretations." (Blumer, 1969, p. 29)

In psychology, similarly, traditionalists such as Bakan, Cronbach, and Bronfenbrenner were challenging the emphasis on verification at the expense of discovery (Cronbach, 1975) and the failure of psychology to take account of the culture and psychology of the psychologists themselves (Bakan, 1974). Bruner, Harre and Bronfenbrenner began to assert the need for a more human science. Bronfenbrenner in particular commented that psychology need not become caught between a "rock and a soft place: The rock is *rigour* and the soft place is *relevance*. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 513). Such a dichotomy, he argued, worked against the development of the discipline.

In education, where research has also been heavily influenced by psychology, idiographic research had long been the subject of attack. (e.g. Kerlinger, 1969) But by the late 1970's, this began to change. Weimer summarised the shift of direction, as influences from sociology, George Kelly, and humanistic psychology, and indeed developments in the natural sciences themselves, gave rise to challenges to taken-for granted assumptions about what constituted legitimate academic research in education:

"Our knowledge of the nature of science and its growth has increased in recent years, and traditional conceptions of science and its methodology have been examined, found wanting and are in large part being abandoned." (Weimer, 1979, p. 18)

That the debate was not merely about methods was asserted by a growing number. Schulman, an educational researcher who has advocated a shift to qualitative methodologies, argues that,

"research methods are not merely different ways of achieving the same end. They carry with them different ways of asking questions and often different commitments to educational and social ideologies." (1981, p. 10)

In addition, the work reviewed previously, such as by Perry, Marton, Entwistle, Parlett and Hamilton and others, was establishing a new tradition. Accessing learners' perspectives, and exploring meanings in context, were increasingly being given prominence over statistical analyses, aimed at producing "behavioural laws (...)applicable ideally to whole classes or sets of individuals and settings." (Kerlinger, 1969)

In conclusion, I felt confident that a qualitative approach was most appropriate. Its aims, design emphases, methods, sampling procedures, and analytic strategies were compatible with the issues I wished to explore and the values which I had developed as an adult educator. In particular, drawing on Bogdan and Biklen (1982), this approach enabled me to pursue research goals of furthering understanding, developing sensitising concepts, and describing multiple realities, rather than defining specific hypotheses and testing relationships between variables. My design could be flexible and evolving, rather than pre-determined, and begin with a tentative focus. My sample could be small and determined by emergent issues and purposeful sampling. Open ended interviewing and participant observation, egalitarian relationships based on trust and the use of people's own words seemed more appropriate than methods based on detached and circumscribed subject-researcher relationships.

Overall, my reviews also led me to conclude that there was a distinct shift across a number of relevant disciplines towards recognising the value of a qualitative approach and the fact that it represented new ways of conceptualising, and doing research that was relevant to working with people.

Voice 2: My review of old and new literature across these disciplines was marked by a combined sense of 'discovery' and 're-discovery'. At this stage in my epistemological journey, I was struggling to find a way of proceeding that was, on the one hand, appropriate to the issue I wanted to investigate, but also one which I could 'own' - which did not fragment the complex whole of my own lived experience, and my values as an adult educator. Although I

could not have easily articulated such concerns, nor accounted for them in a theoretical or paradigmatic framework, I nonetheless knew that, for example, I was not capable of adopting a 'stranger' perspective (Pope, 1981, p. 3) or of violating certain principles I had come to respect about working with adults as learners in my own work. I was to learn later that I was intuitively searching for a kind of 'value resonance':

"To the extent to which the inquirer's personal values, the axioms undergirding the guiding substantive theory, the axioms underlying the guiding methodological paradigm, and the values underlying the context are all consistent and reinforcing, inquiry can proceed meaningfully and will produce findings and interpretations that are agreeable from all perspectives. But to the extent to which they are dissonant, inquiry proceeds only with difficulty and produces findings and interpretations that are questionable and noncredible." (Lincoln and Guba, p. 178)

A full understanding of the meaning of value resonance was to come much later. But at this stage, the validity of my own leanings began to be affirmed by reading about people who were challenging the dominant ways of working in sociology, education and psychology. As such, my willingness and capacity to take on the role of 'academic researcher' - one which previously had felt alienating and threatening - was enhanced. Looking back, it is ironic to note how whereas in 1984-5 I considered such approaches still to be considered 'radical', towards the end of this project, I was later to feel confident that they were becoming mainstream:

"In the epistemological and methodological discussions of recent years the question has increasingly been asked as to whether the empirical-quantitative approach has come to an end...in educational research. The methodology of research in the field of education and socialization emphasizes more and more that qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for coming to terms with the process of education or the development of identity. It has become apparent that many research problems, including those pertaining to the theory of educational science, could not be solved using quantitative methods." (Newmann, 1987, p. 160)

3.3. Getting started: my discovery of grounded theory

Throughout my period of literature review and speculation, I had continually encountered references and acknowledgements to Glaser and Straus' The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967). Their work had undoubtedly had a significant impact on the thinking of psychologists, sociologists and educationalists alike.

This book, encountered shortly before beginning data collection, led to a breakthrough in my thinking. First of all, it provided me with a theoretical framework for submitting questions derived from my own experience and reading to a rigorous and systematic test in the field:

"(...)one should deliberately cultivate (...) reflections on personal experiences. Generally we suppress them or give them the status of mere opinions (...) rather than looking at them as springboards to systematic theorizing. " (p. 252)

This was compatible with the stance adopted by my supervisor:

"For all those involved in trying to understand human life, the enquiry must be rooted in their own personal context, their own personal convictions and their own personal questions. Inescapably, this must mean that learning starts with the exploration and articulation of personal understandings. " (Salmon, 1983, p. 89)

I regarded reflexivity as a central responsibility of the researcher. In other words, my own personal meaning framework needed to be the subject of critical reflection throughout the study. This emphasis was implied but not stressed by Glaser and Strauss but by this time I could make links with other writing by other qualitative researchers.

Journal writing, supervision, inviting structured feedback, reflection with peers, keeping process notes and memos (as suggested by Glaser and Strauss), and the systematic review of critical incidents are some of the means whereby I have tried to maintain objective subjectivity in my own professional work, and which I now regarded as equally relevant to the conduct of a rigorous qualitative study.

Glaser and Strauss also stressed the merits of 'discovery' and 'generation', as opposed to verification of *a priori* conceptions and theory: concerns also of Bakan (1974) and Cronbach (1982). I became excited by the idea of beginning my study with silence. (Psathas, 1973)

Glaser and Strauss also saw research as a process - "as an ever developing entity, not as a perfected product." (p. 32) This methodological stance resonated with my approach as an educator, since

the direction and the structure could unfold, depending upon what emerged from initial fieldwork. They clarified the notion of 'theoretical sampling', which I had first encountered in the work of Patton (1980). Numbers of people are not at issue in grounded theory and generally in qualitative research, but rather, selection is predicated upon , what emergent themes and assumptions, identified through continual analysis, must next be subjected to testing, from different perspectives? (This theme will be explored in terms of my actual practice in Chapter 3)

Finally, the detailed suggestions offered for analysing qualitative data boosted my confidence about working with depth interview material. They were describing a creative, developmental process which could do justice to the richness of human experience I wished to tap through my own qualitative study. Their constant comparative method provided me with a clear conceptual and practical framework for relating to research activity and analysis the notion of learning cycles: for example, beginning with problem posing, followed by reflection, analysis and further testing of emergent ideas. Cycles such as these were central to literature on adults learning (e.g. Kolb, 1984; Boud, 1985; Brookfield, 1986, Freire, 1972).

This book thus provided an important integrating tool for making sense of what I had read previously in terms of actual research practice, and my own previous experience as an educator, while also giving me confidence and specific ideas for beginning fieldwork. Glaser and Strauss also validated my own commitment to seeing dissonances and harmonies within the data not as a problem, but rather as the means by which I could continually elaborate, refine, and challenge an emerging story about the situation of lifelong learners returning to formal learning contexts. By the end of this stage, I felt ready to subject my research questions to the experiences of others.

Voice 2: This reading, prior to beginning data collection, created a state of readiness for the 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1977) that characterised the next stage. I realise now that it was not just the book which triggered a deeper understanding about what it meant to be a qualitative researcher, but also, it was my readiness to interact with, project onto, and

build upon its many suggestions and guidelines for conducting and analysing qualitative research. There were many things which Glaser and Strauss did not address fully, such as reflexivity, the role of the human instrument, and collaborative working. Also, once I was able to replace their framework with one derived from post-positivism, as described by Lincoln and Guba, (stage 3), I was able to see some of the ambiguities in Glaser and Strauss' approach. For example, the distinction between theory in the old paradigm and theory in the new remains ambiguous throughout. A re-reading later on was to reveal to me the extent to which implicit assumptions about prediction and control and objectivity were at work.

My personal interaction with the rich fabric of ideas set out in *Discovery* led to a strong sense of having resolved many of my own previously felt disjunctions about research, and being a researcher. For example, as a subject in traditional research. I had experienced having my meanings re-defined and constricted into a narrow framework of predetermined assumptions and theory. I had seen the subtle ways in which the power of researchers, and the tacit assumptions which underpinned their hypotheses and research practices, could constrict the ability to remain open to alternative conceptions, or the genuine discovery of new meanings. I began this study with a concern that I might have to operate similarly, for the 'sake of the PhD': a compromise I would have found unsettling. The process of working through this sourcebook, upon the foundation of previous reading, enabled me to proceed in ways that no longer felt disconnected from who I was as a person and as an adult educator. I thus took on the role of a 'qualitative researcher' with a sense of confidence and conviction in the viability and appropriateness of this research approach.

These conceptual and epistemological underpinnings served me through the first five cycles of the research,

3.4. Post-positivism: a framework for making sense of epistemological and methodological questions

As shall be described in subsequent chapters, the processes and outcomes the first five cycles of this study were to challenge many of my pre-conceptions, and open me to dimensions of experience to which I had previously been blinkered. My belief in the values of a qualitative approach for accessing alternative conceptions of reality was strengthened. As such, I believe I was open to being taken forward in my epistemological and methodological thinking.

In September, 1986 and in Spring, 1988, at two conferences run by 'new paradigm researchers' (Reason and Rowan, 1981; Marshall, 1981; 1986; Reason and Marshall, 1987) at Bath University, I had the opportunity

to meet with others who were thinking and working in similar ways, and to be challenged in my own development, as a person and a researcher. I also was introduced to post-positivism'.

For the first time, I developed a deep understanding of the notion of paradigm, as opposed to method. The axioms articulated by Lincoln and Guba for post-positivism and the excellent analysis they present in their book, Naturalistic Inquiry (1985) gave voice and substance to many of my previously unarticulated resistances to positivism. The five axioms, which as a result of my involvement in the research up until this point and my previous reading, had great personal meaning, and enabled me to integrate practical, personal and theoretical levels of understanding in relation to these issues. In particular, I realised better that the difference between a quantitative rather than a qualitative approach was far more than one of method. The latter, when considered, from the framework of post-positivism, was founded on:

an ontological belief in multiple constructed realities;

an epistemological belief in the inseparability of knower and known;

the impossibility of generalisation and the potential of inquiry for the raising of questions and the development of 'working hypotheses';

the concept of dynamic and mutual shaping of human experience, always in interaction with temporal and contextual dimensions;

the active acknowledgement of the value-boundness of any inquiry - whatever its paradigm - and therefore the need both to make explicit a level of consciousness on the part of the researcher which is 'objectively subjective' (Rowan, 1981) and to demonstrate ways in which initial assumptions are subjected to challenge and the possibility of change.

(after Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

The other major contribution that Naturalistic Inquiry made to my development stemmed from the legitimacy it gave to these ideas, drawing upon developments in physics, from the philosophy of science, and a formidable range of literature which was entirely new to me. For the first time, I genuinely felt part of a larger movement that was taking place in all fields, in which the neutrality and methods of

science were being, in Hesse's words, evaluated, "as at best unreliable and at worst, self-deceptive." (1980) The notions of paradox and complexity were given a new legitimacy, on the basis of breakthroughs in the natural sciences (e.g. Heisenberg, 1958 and Godel, 1962 in Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Sperry, 1986; Capra, 1982)

I began to explore the differences between the two terrains of postivism and post-positivism, and their implications for research choices: e.g. what I did, how I thought about research, my role in the research, the aims of research, what 'validity' in post positivist research meant, and the alternative criteria of 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) (See Chapter 3). I developed a deep, as opposed to a superficial understanding, of what May meant when he said that,

"theories of learning (like much else in psychology) rest on the investigator's conception of the nature of man. In other words, every learning theorist is a philosopher, though he [sic] may not know it. (May, 1967, p. 90)

The validation of different kinds of knowing - propositional, practical, experiential, emotional - as sources to be used with critical subjectivity in post positivism was one of the most important discoveries for me. Ideas in Human Inquiry (Reason and Rowan, 1981) , that had previously been opaque, developed a new personal meaning. I began to take on board, much more explicitly, the challenge posed by Rowan (1981): "We should not seek knowledge as a thing we can have, but rather be involved in a *personal, circular, contradictory process* of knowing, of inquiry. "

I also began to make sense of why different criteria were required to evaluate research that began with different epistemological or paradigmatic positions. I became concerned to ensure that what I did and how I did it genuinely reflected a commitment to doing 'research with' rather than 'research on' people. For example, the emphasis I gave to follow up of people interviewed in the latter cycles was a direct outcome of these influences.

Overall, the experience of the conference helped to validate what I had been doing as a 'qualitative researcher' and how I had tried to go about it. It also made me far more self-critical about choices I had made. It confirmed the impossibility for me of separating questions about how I approached the role of researcher, from that of being an adult educator, and indeed, being a person. A great deal of learning, gained through my cycles of inquiry thus far, became clearer. I was more able to conceptualise and articulate the tacit assumptions underlying different approaches to research, and their implications. I had a new starting point from which to read, think about and engage further with my study. Both conferences also enabled me to think about myself, in critically subjective ways, that were to lead to a great deal of personal pain and struggle, but equally, a great deal of learning.

Voice 2: I realise now how much I gained from meeting with other qualitative researchers, who, in many fields of study, were struggling to make sense of post-positivism, or the 'new paradigm'. Through dialogue and structured activity, many new insights emerged. Also, the unique structure and process of the conference was conducive to my own integration of certain disjointed strands in my own thinking. I remember being struck by the fact that when I reviewed texts read previously, I had not fully grasped the distinctions underlying qualitative-quantitative debates with regard to epistemological and ontological assumptions. I began to question why this was so. I became increasingly concerned about the wider implications of paradigmatic and epistemological issues for the study of adults learning, and more generally, for research in psychology and education. Although I began my research with a highly sympathetic supervisor, whose own epistemological and paradigmatic stance was fully compatible with the directions in which I was moving, I nonetheless felt somewhat isolated and at odds with the academic environment within which I was working as both staff and student. The Bath conferences, however, affirmed the extent to which I was part of a groundswell of change, and one of a growing number of researchers and academics who share similar concerns, and who are influencing and being influenced by the major paradigmatic shifts taking place in all fields of study - natural and social sciences alike.

New issues and questions with which to struggle, triggered by the Bath conferences, took me on a journey which enabled me to see the restricting assumptions and political biases of the dominant paradigm - well hidden under the thick cloak of the prevailing bias. I became better able to understand the sources of my own past intuitive discomforts and my felt but unarticulated value conflicts. I remembered a story told to me long ago, by a research assistant working in a laboratory where rats were being run on mazes, as part of various behaviourist studies. She described, after a break-in, it

had taken three hours to calm down the rats, before they 'were able to run their mazes.' I reflected on why it is that such vital information is absent from reports of such experiments, and in the behaviourist influenced literature on learning. I wondered if she had had the opportunity to reflect critically on these things...

Theory based on research done to people, based on notions of researcher detachment and objectivity, and developed for the purposes of prediction and control, was anathema to principles of practice deeply engrained in the field of adult education, and my own lived experience as a learner, as a woman, as an educator. But such understandings were by no means easily gained, as shall continue to be evidenced by the second voice.

At this conference, the idea for writing in two voices emerged. I realised that through this approach, I could acknowledge multiple realities, the role of critical subjectivity in my research and the web of connections emerging from the inquiry. The second voice also enables me to foreshadow how the process of doing the research and its findings changed and challenged me and my assumptions and perceptions. Finally, I believe that the second voice provides a way of dealing with issues of gender which were surfaced for the first time by the conference, and which resonated with key themes emerging from the research, particularly from women. (See also Introductory Notes, p. 18) My introduction to people like Marshall (1984), Griffin (1982, 1984), Roberts (1981) and Stanley and Wise (1983) compelled me to confront issues of personal and social identity, relating to my own experiences as a learner, that were unsettling. As Marshall (1984) says, "the first clear identification of oneself as a woman in a man's world is unavoidably disturbing and turbulent." (p. 223, emphasis added) I became aware that this was at the root of some of my own resistances, and the writing block, which I experienced midway through the research. The real responsibilities and challenges of 'critical subjectivity' began to impinge upon me, and I embarked upon an exploration of themes in my own life, which at the beginning, I had seen as merely "background". Like Marshall, (1984), I realised that these were foreground, and centrally at issue within the research itself.

3.5. Finding and sustaining a voice: a continuing journey

The fourth stage of my 'evolving epistemology' continues through to the present. It has emerged out of a great deal of difficult 're-vision', in relation to my own story as a learner and as a woman, but has led to an increasing sense of integration - a key theme in this research. This is the stage from which I have engaged with the writing of this thesis. I call this stage, 'finding and sustaining a voice'. It is the integration of my voices as a researcher working within the terrain of assumptions associated with post-positivism as an adult educator, a woman, and now, a feminist.

When I consider my journey towards 'finding and sustaining a voice', I am struck by how the various stages along the way are perhaps more akin to a spiral of connecting cycles. The understandings which emerged, sometimes in coherent forms, more often than not in ways that were felt but remained unarticulated, would spiral back to shed light on earlier periods of confusion and clarity. New insights would suddenly pierce through the centre of the emergent spiral, illuminating new questions. My progression during this journey was by no means linear. Overall, the gradual confidence that has emerged out of often difficult struggles with major questions, about research, knowledge, learning, gender and myself, is perhaps best summarised by Marge Piercy in her poem, 'Unlearning to not speak':

Phrases of men who lectured her
drift and rustle in piles
Why don't you speak up?

...You have the wrong answer.
The wrong line, wrong face.

She must learn again to speak
Starting with I
Starting with We...

(Marge Piercy, 1978, p. 38)

Finding and sustaining a voice, as expressed through this thesis, carries with it what Marshall (1981) describes as a sense of "rightness". Her words I can now understand much better. I can likewise feel confident that the process and outcomes of this study, are themselves the result of rigorous critical self-reflection, and a systematic and disciplined approach to post-positivist inquiry. Moreover, paradoxically, although I did not set out to do a feminist study, I have since discovered that many of the values I have tried to reflect in the process of the research and its presentation are akin to what many feminist researchers advocate in seeking a meaning for the, 'personal is political', in epistemological and methodological stances. For example:

"Radical feminism argues that there must be a relationship between theory and practice which not only sees these as inextricably interwoven, but which sees experience and practice as the basis of theory, and theory as the means of changing practice. We argue that a similar relationship should exist between theory,

experience and research. We feel that it is inevitable that the researcher's own experiences and consciousness will be involved in the research process as much as they are in life, and [...] that all research must be concerned with the experiences and consciousness of the researcher as an integral part of the research process. (Stanley and Wise, p. 48)

"...the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (Oakley, 1981)

Nonetheless, I remain all too aware of the limitations and possibilities, of the paradoxes and the questions, that are associated with working in this paradigm. These remain to be further understood through future cycles of inquiry.

Voice 2:I realise now how this epistemological journey has enabled me to begin to feel validated for intuitive resistances that I had carried for years about academic research: little understood but deeply felt. The research itself was to enable me to consider these issues eventually within a wider epistemological framework, but also from my perspective as a woman. I was to learn why I had tended to regard my resistances to academic research as reflective of a deficit in me, rather than as indicative of something fundamentally wrong about some of its basic assumptions. I was to come to know how many women speak and write about how frightening it is to voice their deepest concerns, and how as a result, we move into a hazy confused territory which can put us at odds with our inner selves, and how we see and relate to the world.

Belenky (1986) whose work I was to discover much later, speaks of disconnected knowledge. As women, we come to know the risks entailed in saying what we know or putting forward an alternative perspective. And we also come to know the deafening of the silence when we find the courage to do so. Accomodating the mixed messages we receive from ourselves and from the world in which we find ourselves can give rise to a strong sense of disjunction, which we may manage in ways that are, ultimately, at our own expense and the expense of others.

4. Research for discovery or maintenance of the status quo?

Overall, the beginnings of my epistemological journey helped to establish conceptual clarity about my commitment to being involved in a human science that enabled me to be surprised by what I discovered, as Bakan (1974) had urged; nor did I have a vested interest in preserving the status quo.

As Argyris (1980) argues, in support of Kuhn (1970),

Normal science distances itself from the basic features of life but it also develops knowledge that reinforces the status quo. There are few, if any, liberating alternatives produced by normal science methodology because the theory of action implicit in the conduct of rigorous research is consonant with the theory of action of most individuals; that is, it is consonant with the status quo...the aim of knowledge is not only to systematize that which exists but also to invent that which does not exist as yet." (Argyris, 1980, pp 5-6)

This theme is echoed by other educational and qualitative researchers, such as Parlett and Hamilton (1972), Pope (1985) and Salmon (1985). For example,

"...by discarding a spurious 'technological' simplification of reality, and by acknowledging the complexity of the educational process, the [researcher] is likely to increase rather than lessen the sense of uncertainty in education. On the other hand, unless [qualitative studies] ...are vigorously pursued there is little hope of moving beyond helpless indecision or doctrinaire assertion in the conduct of instructional affairs. " (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972, p. 22/27)

"As things are now in academic psychology, [the] personal framework is characteristically ignored; instead, external definitions, focuses and assumptions are uncritically adopted. The result is that the material of learning remains superficial and devoid of any real meaning. The personal standpoint which should have informed the study of psychology is treated with disrespect, but it takes its revenge in sabotaging the attempt to assimilate ideas that are personally alien...By its present exposition of one particular viewpoint, one particular life-style, it legitimises and serves the privileged minority in our society. Through its incorporating of the perspectives of that minority. it maintains demeaning stereotypes and ignorance of other groups. Because it refuses to examine the standpoint of the research which constitutes its accepted wisdom, it reifies all the assumptions and practices of our present-day society. " (Salmon, 1983, p 92)

Since the numbers of adults returning to formal education are certain to increase rapidly over the next decade, and access is becoming a critically important policy and planning issue in higher education institutions, my focus of inquiry, my epistemological questions, and my methodological decisions seemed especially significant.

My initial review of the literature indicated that a great deal of previous research in relation to mature students returning to

higher education, had been undertaken within the framework of assumptions characterising the traditional scientific model. These studies tended to begin with pre-defined hypotheses influenced by tacit and largely status quo conceptions of education, learning, and mature students. Some of the most challenging research seemed to emerge out of different methodological starting points and assumptions.

Much of the 'received wisdom' in the literature on adults learning has also been based largely on practitioners' assertions, derived from the experience of teaching largely white middle class adults. An exception to this was provided by some of the adult education literature in this country, based on work towards social change with, not the perspectives, of working class adults largely outside the mainstream education system. I was not familiar with this literature at the beginning of the study.. No study, however, had looked at the influence of lifelong learning outside as well as inside formal education on the expectations and experiences that non-traditional students had of learning and being a learner again in the formal education system.

Most importantly, at the beginning of this study, I had found no research that had enabled non-traditional students to define *on their own terms* their interpretations and experiences of returning to, and learning within higher and continuing education. By now I had realised that I would be charting new territory - in methodological and theoretical terms, as well as in terms of the academic context within which my degree was registered. I was encouraged, however, by the writing of Budd Hall, to whom I was introduced by a friend who was researching non-formal education in developing countries:

"Research in adult education is at an early stage of development. Within this specialization we still have time to select research approaches that suit us uniquely and thereby keep us one step ahead of other social sciences now going through the throes of discarding an antiquarian pursuit. "(Hall, 1975, p. 28)

Voice 2: At the time of this writing up, the particular focus and approach of my own study remains unreplicated. The authors of a recent book on adults' learning, based on learners' perspectives,

explain that they compiled this series of studies because of their own dissatisfaction with the,

"...paucity and incompleteness of research on adult learning (...)It often focused on questions which did not seem central to those involved in the education of adults. There was typically no sense of who the persons were as learners and what they aspired to, and little appreciation of the processes in which they were engaged. Rarely, if ever, were the learners' points of view taking into account - except for their response to the researcher's preset questions, based on a framework or 'theory' that the research was testing. Finding implications for how to teach or facilitate learning was difficult and arbitrary. The gap between researchers and practitioners was real, understandable and growing. " (Boud and Griffin, 1987)

It is to this gap that I have sought to make a distinctive contribution.

In 1985, when I began data collection and analysis, I did not appreciate fully the extent to which I was indeed embarking on new terrain. I did have a sense of conviction, however, based on my initial review of relevant literature, that my decision to use a qualitative methodology was not just valid in terms of developments in relevant disciplines, and relevant to the concerns I wished to explore in this study. It seemed critical to the generation of new questions, new knowledge and new understandings about the situation of non-traditional students, as lifelong learners, returning to higher education.

5. From questions of epistemology back to questions of methodology

My engagement in critical reflection and a review of different spheres of literature, relating both to epistemological and substantive issues during the first year of my registration, and my 'discovery' of grounded theory (identified as stage 2 above) suggested a way for moving forward with data collection. My purpose here is to outline generally my methodological orientation and decisions in the Autumn of 1984. Details relating to my conduct of the study over the course of its eight cycles, as influenced by the emergent design and continual data analysis, will be addressed in Chapter 3.

My research interests, considerably sharpened by this initial period of research, can generally be summarised at this stage as follows:

To explore and expand understanding, and develop sensitising concepts (Bogdan and Biklen, 1985) relating to the situation of adult learners.

More specifically, I had chosen to focus on:

how adults' prior experiences of and meanings for learning inside and outside education might influence the ways in which they anticipated and experienced a return to formal learning contexts, and particularly higher education.

In other words, I was concerned to illuminate the multiple frames of reference that learners might use to make sense of their experiences in formal learning contexts. In the words of Parlett and Hamilton, "My aims were description and interpretation, rather than measurement and prediction." (1977, p. 13) I had little interest in evaluating the effectiveness of courses, nor establishing a comparison of different curricular approaches. I was, however, interested to learn if adults' prior experiences of different kinds of approaches to teaching and learning (assuming alternative forms of learning were on the increase) established particular kinds of expectations of higher education programmes.

I was committed to the notion of grounding any emergent sensitising concepts in learners' experiences themselves, rather than determining beforehand what specific hypotheses were to be tested. As such, I began with the assumption that adult learners were by no means passive recipients of knowledge, but rather active 'meaning-makers', capable of being co-participants in this research project. Since my interest was in illuminating salient dimensions of learner experience, rather than proving or disproving a relationship between variables, and since there were practical management concerns, the study was necessarily going to be intensive and small scale. This was in accord with my commitment to an exploratory study, concerned with meanings, since no previous research seemed to have adopted my particular focus.

In order to access data relating to influences of lifelong learning, I felt it was necessary to use a retrospective approach. My own experience of written instruments caused me to reject them as a choice, preferring instead to interact directly with participants, using a fairly open-ended approach that would enable me to become sensitised to, and build upon, their concerns. My own background and training enabled me to trust in my expertise in the use of this research methodology. I decided to adopt a life story/depth interview approach, which I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. A life story approach, as opposed to a 'life history' approach seemed more suitable to my purposes: "the concept of life story is used to designate the retrospective information itself without the corroborative evidence often implied by the term *life history*.. (Tagg, 1985, p. 163) The latter would result in massive amounts of factual individual detail that was of less concern to me than an understanding of the different ways in which adults described and made sense of their past and current experiences of learning in different situations. (I elaborate on the use of this approach in Chapter 3)

My intention at the outset was to research learners' experiences within more than one formal learning context, focusing particularly on different higher education situations: for example, polytechnics, universities, access courses; courses that were characterised by both progressive and traditional teaching and learning strategies. In other words, a multi-site study seemed most appropriate to my concern to explore basic social processes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) , rather than multiple perspectives operating in a specific learning situation.

I planned to begin the study with students on whom concerns with access were concurrently focused and who had traditionally been under-represented in higher education, as discussed in Chapter 1. Not only were 'non-traditional students' virtually unrepresented in the literature. I was also interested to see if and how social differences impinged on the frameworks that adults used to make sense of their experiences as learners learning in higher education.

I decided to concentrate initially on adults who were age approximately 30 or upwards, and who were doing a first degree or diploma, after a period of some absence from education. My purpose in doing this was to maximise the chances that the break had been sufficiently long to expose them to alternative forms and processes of learning. I planned to use a five year absence as a rule of thumb, although this may have occurred several years previously - such as in the case of an adult who did A levels in a further education college prior to entry to higher education.

My aim was to use purposeful/theoretical sampling strategies (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1980; Parlett and Hamilton, 1977) and ongoing data analysis coupled with reflexive techniques designed to focus on myself as the researcher. In combination, these would guide subsequent research decisions. In other words, I intended that my research design be evolving and flexible, beginning with a tentative, rather than a detailed focus. I wished to review my multi-site orientation, however, after a period of fieldwork in a particular setting. Some preliminary exploratory investigations seemed essential to determining whether my focus on prior learning and essentially on learners' perspectives was useful in terms of deepening understanding of the situation of adult learners. My provisional stance on this, therefore, caused me to speak with staff members as well as students, in four different departments, during the initial research cycle carried out at Cityside (a pseudonym), beginning in January, 1985. I later decided to maintain my original commitment to a multi-site approach: the choice of settings being determined by issues which had arisen at Cityside (to be described in detail in Chapter 3).

Cityside emerged as a suitable site for beginning data collection in the autumn of 1984. A colleague introduced me to the Head of Department of an inner city polytechnic which had a high proportion of 'non-traditional students'. He in turn facilitated introductions with key contact people - course and admission tutors - in three other departments, and gained the approval of the Deputy Head of the polytechnic. They in turn introduced me to relevant students. This location for my first cycle of data collection allowed me to speak with students across three faculties, and departments which varied in

several respects. The processes entailed in meeting and talking with students shall be detailed in Chapter 3.

I began with full time students since I believed that they would be in a better position to compare and contrast their lifelong learning with expectations and experiences of the 'here and now', since they were fully immersed in a course. I also decided to meet with second year students initially, on the assumption that they would have survived their first year exams and probably be less preoccupied with final examinations and future concerns.

In Chapter 3, I shall now address issues relating to my conduct of this study, and the nature of my engagement in its processes, and with the adults who participated in its eight cycles.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONDUCT OF THIS CYCLICAL INQUIRY

1. Introduction

Part I is intended to lay the foundation for Part II, which is devoted entirely to the presentation of the final analysis with supporting data and discussion through the second voice. In this section, I shall discuss procedures and processes relating to my conduct of this study. My aim is to illustrate how the issues addressed in Chapters 1 and 2 were translated into actual practice, as well as give substance and form to the eight cycles of the research.

I shall begin this chapter by elaborating on the notion of, 'research cycles': a theme introduced in Chapter 2. I shall then provide an overview of the eight cycles, followed by a description of how the focus of each cycle emerged from what had preceded. This shall be followed by consideration of the following methodological concerns:

- methods of data collection and recording
- meeting and talking with students;
- data analysis
- the emergent conceptual formulation: disjunction and integration
- validity, trustworthiness and arbitrariness

Appendices will provide summaries offering details of key participants, including their educational backgrounds, and of the different kinds of formal learning situations that influenced the retrospections of participants.

My approach to the conduct of this cyclical inquiry reflects my own interpretation of the meanings, implications and responsibilities entailed in doing a qualitative, and what I later came to identify as a post-positivist study.

2. The notion of research cycles

Cycles are often used to describe the processes and assumptions associated with qualitative research (e.g. see Rowan, 1981; Heron, 1981; Bannister, 1981). Theorists and writers concerned with adults learning also are increasingly using cycles to describe complex learning processes (e.g. see Belenky et al, 1986; Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1975, 1984; Mezirow, 1977; 1985; Taylor, 1986). For me, the notion of a cycle affirms the common emphasis in adult education and in qualitative research on the importance of a "dialectical process of engagement with the world. " (Rowan, 1981, p. 98).

Cycles convey the web of recursive processes characteristic of dialectical engagements in different kinds of activity: experience (e.g. data collection); reflection (including on self as the 'human instrument' carrying out the research); 'making sense' (e.g. through conceptualisation, analysis, supervision and writing); further application and testing (e.g. through another cycle of data collection) (after Kolb, 1984).

Lincoln and Guba's description of an 'emergent design' accurately captures the ways in which the focus and location of each cycle was determined by issues that had previously emerged. Here they describe the process and the purposes of such a research design:

[The researcher] elects to allow the research design to emerge (flow, cascade, unfold) rather than to construct it preordinately (a priori) because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately; because what emerges as a function of the interaction between inquirer and phenomenon is largely unpredictable in advance; because the inquirer cannot know sufficiently well the patterns of mutual shaping that are likely to exist; and because the various value systems involved (including the inquirer's own) interact in unpredictable ways to influence the outcome. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 41)

In each setting, I explored participants' expectations and experiences of returning to different kinds of formal learning contexts, although focusing themes for the interviews were determined by previous outcomes. By allowing contexts to vary, I could use the

regularities and anomalies that occurred across the accounts of particular individuals as the basis for theory development.

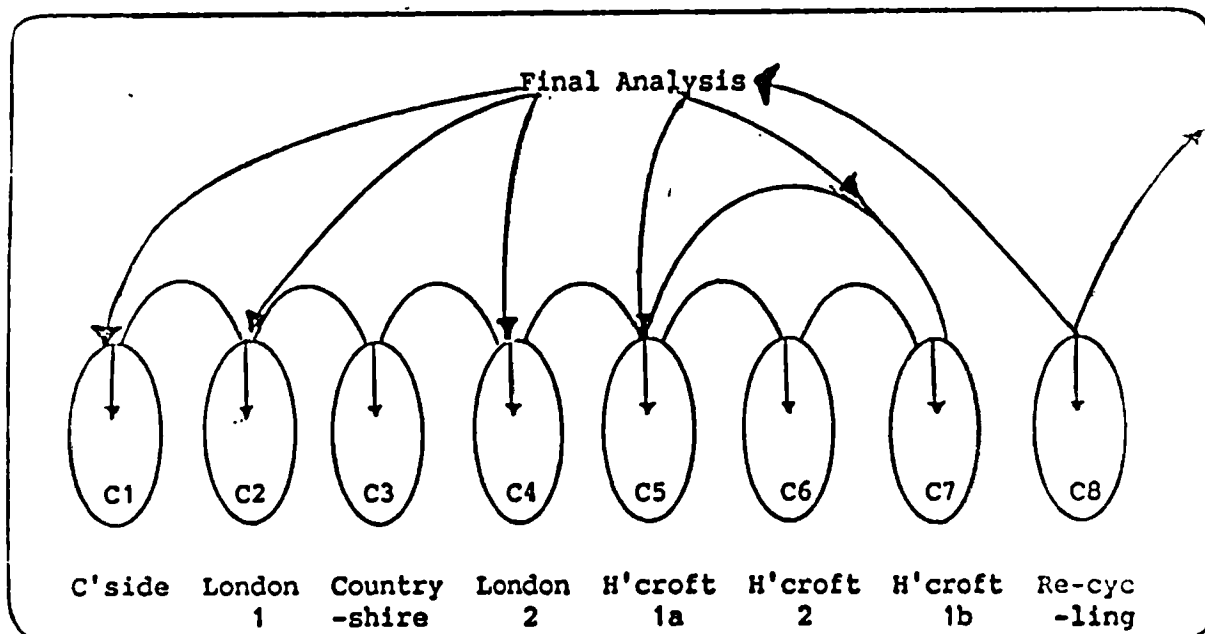
In the sections which follow, I shall detail first the nature of each cycle, and then, in the context of an overview of the emergent design, its purpose in terms of emergent themes and criteria for selection, beginning with 'Cityside' which served as the foundation for the study.

3. Overviews of the eight research cycles

3.1. Diagrammatic Overview

The cycles of this inquiry can be summarised basically thus:

Figure 2: Pictorial overview of the eight research cycles



3.2. Descriptive overview, with tables offering^{details}/of key participants and methods of data collection

3.2.1. Introduction and key to tables

In the following overview of the cycles, pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants and the institutions, as agreed prior to data collection. Two exceptions are made. The first of these is London University. Here I spoke with students from two different colleges, to which I refer merely by number (e.g. College 1 and 2). Secondly, there is no attempt to disguise Hillcroft College, as agreed with staff and participants. It is unique as the only women's residential college in Britain offering access routes to higher education and therefore it would be pointless to try to disguise its identity.

Adults in the following kinds of learning situations participated in the study. Details follow relating to participants and methods of data collection.

The following key pertains to tables offered in this section:

Key: F=female; M=male; WC=working class (self-identified); MC=middle class (self-identified) (arrow indicates those who felt that they had leanings towards another social class); ^{C?=class unknown} B=Black; W=White; I'=Life story interview 1; G'=Group interview 1; T'= First occasion for informal discussion; Wr=Written material provided; I²= Life story Interview 2; G²= Group interview 2; T²= Follow up occasion for informal conversation; C7= Cycle 7 follow up; 8=Cycle 8 follow up.

Details relating to the identification of social class, methods of data collection and recording are provided in subsequent sections, and cycle 8 are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

3.2.2. Cycle 1

Cycle 1, context A: (January-June, 1985) Adults on an undergraduate degree or diploma course (four departments, three faculties) in an urban polytechnic ('Cityside')

Table 1: Summary of Cycle 1 ('Cityside') participants and methods, including those followed up in Cycle 8

Name	F	M	WC	MC	C?	B	W	I'	G'	T'	Wr	I ²	G ²	T ²	C8
Todd		*	*				*	*	*		*				
Diane	*		*				*	*				*		*	
Frank		*	*				*	*							
Godfrey		*	*			*		*	*	*				*	*
Janice	*		*			*		*	*	*				*	*
Laurence		*	*				*	*	*	*					
Ethel	*		*				*	*	*			*		*	*
Darcy	*		*				*	*						*	
Fran	*		*				*	*							
Victor		*		*			*			*	*				
Winston		*	*				*				*				
Xenia	*			*			*		*	*	*				
Jo	*		*				*		*	*					
Gary		*	*				*		*	*	*				
Kath	*		*				*		*	*					
Kim	*		*				*		*						
Douglas		*	*			*			*						*
Rama	*				*	*				*					
Julien		*			*	*				*					
Shanti	*				*	*				*					
Alex	*			*			*	*							
Rhoda	*		<---*				*	*	*	*	*				
Patrica	*		*--->				*	*	*	*	*			*	
Connie	*		<---*				*	*						*	*
G'gette	*		*--->				*	*	*	*	*				
TOTALS	16	9	17	5	3	6	19	14	14	14	7	0	0	7	5

3.2.3. Cycle 2

Cycle 2, Context B: (September, 1985) Adults on a M.A. course in London University, College 1

Table 2:Summary of Cycle 2 (London University, College 1) participants and methods, including those followed up in Cycle 8

Name	F	M	WC	MC	C?	B	W	I'	G'	TK	C8
Jane	*			*			*	*		*	*
Amy	*			*			*	*		*	
Raissa	*			*			*	*		*	
Derek		*	*---	>			*	*		*	
Totals	3	1	1	3	0	0	4	4	0	4	1

3.2.4. Cycle 3

Cycle 3, Context C: (February, 1986) Women on a post-experience 8 week continuing education course offered by a local authority (Countryshire)

Table 3:Summary of Cycle 3 ('Countryshire') female participants and methods.

Name	F	WC	MC	C?	B	W	I
Nina	*		*			*	*
Pamela	*		*			*	*
Sheila	*	*				*	*
Totals:	3	1	2	0	0	3	3

Note: None were able to be followed up in Cycle 8.

3.2.5. Cycle 4

Cycle 4, Context D: (April, 1986) A self-managed learner in the sense of Tough (1979) (See Chapter 1) who returned to and subsequently left part-time post-graduate study (London University, College 2)

Table 4:Summary of Cycle 4 (London University, College 2):
participant's details and method, including follow up in
Cycle 8

Name	M	WC	MC	C?	B	W	I
Peter	*		*			*	*
Total	1	0	1	0	0	1	1

3.2.6. Cycle 5

Cycle 5, Context E : (May,1986) Adults on the Hillcroft two year diploma course, which provided an access route to higher education (Hillcroft 1a)

Table 5:Summary of Cycle 5 (Hillcroft 1a)
participants and methods, including those followed
up in Cycles 7 and 8

Name	F	M	WC	MC	C?	B	W	I'	G'	C7	I	C8
Rita	*		*				*		*		*	
Gaynor	*		*				*		*		*	
Karen	*		*				*	*			*	*
Marion	*		*				*	*				
Susan	*		*				*	*			*	
Nicole	*		*---				*	*			*	
Penny	*		*				*	*				
Victoria	*		*				*	*				
Sally	*		*				*	*			*	*
Nancy	*		<---	*			*	*				
Cynthia	*		*				*		*			
Patsy	*			*			*		*			
TOTALS	12		10	2	0	0	11	8	4	0	6	2

3.2.7. Cycle 6

Cycle 6, Contexts F1-F3: (July, 1986) Adults, not previously involved in the study, who had completed the Hillcroft two year diploma in 1983 and had gone on to other formal learning contexts (two to polytechnics, one to university) (Hillcroft 2) None were able to be followed up in Cycle 8.

Table 6: Summary of Cycle 6 (Hillcroft 2) key female participants and methods

Name	F	WC	MC	C?	B	W	I	GP
Janet	*		*			*	*	*
Vera	*	*---	>			*	*	*
Andrea	*	<---	*			*	*	*
Totals	3	1	2	0	0	3	3	3

3.2.8. Cycle 7

Cycle 7, Contexts G1-G6: (1987-1988) Adults from Hillcroft College interviews in Cycle 5 who were followed up 1-2 years after they had gone onto diploma and degree courses: 2 to Hillcroft's Diploma after completing the 'Returning to Learning' course; 3 to university; one to polytechnic, who left after her first year. (Hillcroft 1b)

Table 7 : Summary of Cycle 7 (Hillcroft 1b) female participants and methods, including those followed up in Cycle 8

Name	F	M	WC	MC	C?	B	W	I ²	G ²	C8
Rita	*		*				*	*		
Gaynor	*		*				*	*		
Susan	*		*				*	*		
Nancy	*		*---	>			*	*		
Sally	*		*				*	*	*	*
Karen	*		*				*	*	*	*
Totals	6	0	6	0	0	0	6	6	2	2

3.2.8. Cycle 8

Cycle 8: Checking for meaningfulness and credibility of the final data analysis (Autumn, 1988). Adults who had previously participated in the study were followed up with the aim of seeking their feedback on the initial summary of the final analysis, and their reflections on their interview transcript from an alternative vantage point in their lives. Some were also sent a draft copy of an article, in which some outcomes of the study were reported (Weil, 1988). Three additional checks for credibility and meaningfulness were carried out with adults who had not participated in the study. (To be discussed in greater detail in sections which follow)

Appendix 1 provides details of participants and methods across Cycles 1-6; and follow up contacts in Cycles 7 and 8.

Appendix 2 offers a summary of the kinds of formal learning situations from which adults reflected on their prior learning, inside and outside formal education.

Appendix 3 offers a summary of details relating to the educational background and transition points for the 35 participants involved in life story interviews across the full eight cycles.

4. An Emergent Design in Practice: the process of the Cycles

Here I shall outline broadly some of the ways in which theoretical sampling considerations, as indicated in Chapter 2, guided my decision making during the research and shaped the emergent design of the overall study:

"What groups or subgroups does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose? The possibilities of multiple comparisons are infinite, and so groups must be chosen according to theoretical criteria." (Glaser and Strauss, p. 47, original emphasis)

4.1. Cityside as a foundation

4.1.1. Purposes and choices

The purpose of the first cycle was to see if my initial questions were valid: did prior lifelong learning, within and outside formal education, seem to have a bearing on the expectations and experiences of that formal learning context? Did experience of other methods of learning (assuming various forms of organised learning and training were on the increase) establish certain expectations?

As indicated previously, I spoke with students across three faculties. I began with adults who were over 30, and who had had a five year absence before returning to a formal learning context. Some had re-entered through participation in further education classes, but the majority had entered Cityside directly with non-standard qualifications (ie without A levels). (See Appendix 3)

I began with full time students, since I believed that they would be in a better position to compare and contrast their lifelong learning with expectations and experiences of the 'here and now', since they were fully immersed in a course. I also decided to meet with second year students, on the assumption that they would have survived their first year exam and probably be less preoccupied with finals or future concerns.

4.1. 2. Emergent issues

I hit all sorts of unexpected dimensions and complexities of learner experience at Cityside, and the emergent themes set the foundation for the remainder of the study. For example, I learned that experiences outside the formal education system had been significant for many, but not through learner-centred courses as I had anticipated. A significant number seemed to have discovered a sense of identity and possibility as a learner outside the formal system in other ways, either as a result of fortuitous circumstances (such as finding a mentor at work or through participation in a women's group) or

through considerable pain and struggle (such as through unemployment or changing countries.)

Moreover, for a surprising number of students, the experience of returning to learning within an academic context seemed to have been fraught with a great deal of struggle. Many of their struggles were unfamiliar to me: for example, those relating to conflicting meanings for learning, power relationships, dialogue, quality and standards, and identity. Others, more familiar, such as the ways in which their experience was valued and built upon as a basis for learning, opened my eyes to subtleties and complexities of meaning. Finally, the whole notion of personal and social identity emerged with a vengeance. People continually described a sense of feeling pulled apart and fragmented; for a number this re-surfaced feelings associated with prior experiences of formal education. Some would contrast what they had experienced with prior experiences of learning - largely outside educational institutions - in which they had felt a sense of wholeness; others described the conditions under which, on their programme, they had experienced this. As such, the seeds of the final issue around which the final analysis is organised, formulated subsequently as, 'disjunction and integration' (as discussed later in this Chapter) were present in the data and my analytic memoes from an early stage. (Appendix 4 offers some examples of theoretical notes and reflections at this stage).

4.1.3. Social class as a signifier of meaning

The extent to which social class emerged in these adults' stories as a key issue in relation to their experience as learners, especially during the time of their initial school years, never ceased to shock me - perhaps as an American? These issues were not ones which I had considered before. (At this time I had had no contact with radical adult education literature in this country which dealt directly with issues of class and education.)

Although I had come to know that class was a major signifier of meaning in British society generally, I had not thought about it in relation to learning in the ways that were emerging. I became

interested in people's self-perceived class identity. In other words, what meaning did it have for them as people, and as learners?

Traditionally in human science research, when identifying as salient a variable such as social class, it has been seen as necessary to choose an indicator that distinguishes, for example, working class from middle class people. Occupation has long been used as that indicator in social science research, and in particular mens' occupations. Social class is then often determined by second-order category schemes, such as the registrar general's classification of occupations by social class scale. This puts, for example, professional people at the top and various grades of manual workers at the bottom. McNeil (1985) asserts that, in their use of the registrar general's classification, researchers do not claim that occupation is, "the same thing as social class, but that it is the best single indicator of all those aspects of a person that make up their social class position." (p. 22)

The use of any such indicators are inevitably problematic. For example, the use of such criteria may not cohere for women:

"This classification, all-pervasive in employment, health and other statistics, is based on the way in which men's jobs are distributed, so that even if a researcher decides to use a woman's own occupation (rather than her husband's or father's) it does not really work adequately." ((Roberts, 1981, p. 23)

Moreover, such indicators fail to take account of occupational changes over the course of a lifetime, which may involve changes in the material and social circumstances of an individual.

At the beginning of the study, I had no intention of explicitly addressing social class as a distinguishing feature, despite being generally interested in the experiences of 'non-traditional students'. After Cityside, however, I felt that I had no choice but to do so. In the context of these adult learners' meanings and life stories, their experience of themselves in social class terms seemed to have been a significant influence on their meanings for learning and the ways in which they anticipated and experienced higher education. Their sense of self-worth and possibility as a learner seemed to have been eroded

by their language, their identity, their family background having been placed continually at issue, as will be demonstrated in the analysis which follows in Part II. Their stories brought substance to the assertion made by Reynolds:

"Whilst there may well be family factors and wider social class influences responsible for school failure in both the cognitive and affective areas, much evidence suggests that it is the workings of the educational system itself that is responsible for much pupil alienation. "(Reynolds, 1984)

Thus, it became important to find some way of making this dimension of learner experience an explicit focus in the study. This was inevitably problematic. I was uncomfortable with choosing an 'objective indicator', well aware of how problematic this was in terms of women. Moreover, any superimposed category system would jar with the values and ways of working that were integral to my research approach. I therefore chose to pose social class as a question mark, and invite study participants to consider whether and how this might have meaning in the context of their life stories as learners.

Consequently, what each interviewee meant by 'social class' will obviously vary, and indeed, a number identified just how complicated this category system is, when examined in the context of different learning situations over the course of a lifetime. I also chose to respect peoples' own uncertainties and ambiguities about this dimension of their experience and identity, and therefore in the charts which summarise cycle details at the end of this chapter, I have tried to capture this. I identify those who saw themselves as 'in-between', indicating also the social class category with which they tended to identify more than another. For example, as a child a learner may have had a sense of learner identity which incorporated a clear sense of being working class. The meanings for this may have been associated with parent and teacher expectations, peer pressure not to achieve, and others' judgements of lifestyle or accent. There were those, however, who had a strong sense of 'being working class' at school, but later became a professional. By occupation, they might thus be 're-classified' as middle-class, using the registrar general's categories. What was at issue in the interviews, however, was how prior learning influenced the ways in which they anticipated and

experienced a return to formal learning contexts. A sense of disjunction, for example, could be associated with a sense of feeling at odds with certain meanings and priorities in a particular learning context, as compared to previous experiences. Learners sometimes made sense of this in terms of how they perceived their social class background, since, in a particular context, this had particular meaning.

Inevitably, this is 'messy', as any attempt to specify social class always is. By adopting this approach, however, all sorts of paradoxes and contradictions to do with social class as a 'signifier of meaning' have emerged, as will be shown in Part II. It is this very messiness that seemed critical to deepening my own understanding of the situation of adult returners, after my period of field research at Cityside.

4.1. 4. Reflections on my experience of the Cityside research cycle

What was clear from the outset was that by focusing on learners' perspectives, I was being forced to think about learning and adults returning to learning in ways that went well beyond what Knowles, Kolb or I had thought about before. This was unsettling, to say the least. For example, my positive images of higher education were significantly jarred. I felt plunged into cultural terrains relating to social class which heightened a sense of alienness, and threatened implicit assumptions. Accessing meanings that threaten established ways of viewing and organising the world, as Kelly says, "looms up as culpably subjective and dangerously subversive to the scientific establishment." (1970a, in Pope, 1985, p. 5)

4.2. After Cityside

After Cityside, I made my focus on initial education and learning outside formal education far more deliberate. I tended to encourage a fairly chronological approach to start with, in order to establish an initial scaffolding around which I could encourage elaboration and probe to see if and how certain issues suggested by the Cityside accounts were at work. I retained a very open ended focus, however,

inviting participants to speak about their experiences as learners over time in their terms.

In Cycle 1, I had decided to focus on 'non-traditional students'. In Cycle 2, I deliberately sought out white middle class post-graduate students. They too had been out of formal education for at least five years. I was curious to know if the Cityside themes, in relation to lifelong learning and their expectations of higher education (they were at the beginning of a course) arose as persistently as ^{they} ~~it~~ had in the retrospective accounts at Cityside. Some new dimensions about learning inside and outside formal education emerged, particularly in relation to how these adults had identified with, and made use of, formal education. Social class was not at issue in these adults' stories, except for one man who regarded himself as from a working class background and who now felt betwixt and between, having become a teacher. Themes that had been present in Cityside accounts were absent in the women's accounts, and further complexities in relation to the social class axis ^e ~~w~~ere suggested. Some contrasting themes and patterns that seemed associated with the experience of being 'a professional' emerged: for example, an in and out pattern with regard to formal education.

In Cycle 3, I sought out adults who were on a rigorous continuing professional development programme offered by their employer. Although academic content was central to this course, tutors' were committed to expressing in practice key values and principles of adult learning (such as those based on Kolb and Knowles as described in Chapter 1). I was concerned to examine the ways in which prior lifelong learning - within and outside the educational system - put certain things at issue in relation to a return to a formal learning context more generally: in other words, one that was not academic, but significant, structured, and involving commitment over time (in this case, eight weeks.) This course also offered a learner-centred approach comparable to that which I offered in my previous 'trainer training'. Although I retained the same open ended approach, and probed in relation to emergent themes as well as prior issues, I believe that I was still clinging to progressive educational methodologies as a legitimate level of explanation. This cycle enabled me to consider their

relevance from alternative perspectives. Professionals' recurrent use of formal education and professional development opportunities continued to be in evidence: contrasting with patterns that had emerged from Cityside participants, many of whom had not regarded formal education as an option.

Cycle 4 involved me in interviewing Peter, a neighbour who over the previous year had commented on various occasions about his experience of returning to post-graduate study, after a long period of systematic self-managed study of academic subjects and a frustrating time at university, some years after leaving secondary school. Eventually in the study, his own educational background and his strong sense of identity as a self-managed learner, seemed to offer a relevant opportunity to explore emergent themes from an alternative perspective.

In Cycle 5, I went to Hillcroft College because it afforded the opportunity to speak with non-traditional students who, like the Cityside students, and one of the Countryshire students, were likely to have had difficult initial education experiences and a long absence from formal education. I was curious to see if and how the previous themes and patterns arose in relation to their lifelong learning, and their experience of the Hillcroft environment. Hillcroft was set up to provide a rigorous 1 or two year academic experience, designed to be the equivalent of at least the first year of an undergraduate degree programme. Its purposes are to offer such a learning experience and a supportive environment to women who have been previously disadvantaged by prior educational or life experiences. It seeks to build the confidence of such learners whom it is assumed will benefit from the experience of higher education. Many Hillcroft students also go on to universities and polytechnics to do degrees, so in this respect it provides an access route to higher education. The fact that Hillcroft was a college for 'women' was not at issue for me in my selection of it. In fact, that it was for women only was a source of concern, and I debated at the time as to whether men and women on a university extra-mural course might have been a wiser choice. I opted for Hillcroft in the end because it was an academic environment but of a particular kind, for particular kinds of students.

The stories of the Hillcroft women did indeed elaborate previous patterns around the themes of 'learner identity' in relation to initial education and outside formal education. Experiences of losing confidence and identity outside formal education, which had been suggested by only some women's accounts at Cityside, became considerably more prominent. So too were accounts of 'discovery' experiences, in which a sense of learner identity and possibility had arisen. There were familiar and less familiar dimensions of experience relating to how and why these women had made the transition back to formal education, and the expectations associated with that, shaped by prior experience within and outside the system. However, their accounts of learning in that academic situation were characterised by new themes: those of 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1978), confidence building, discovery and the processes of learning with others within formal education emerged. New questions were posed, since in background many of the women I interviewed at Hillcroft were working class.

The majority of those whom I interviewed planned to carry on with their academic study, either with the second year of the Hillcroft diploma (3 students), or , for the remainder, with a degree course, following completion of their diploma. Their anxieties about moving on were laced with references to ex-Hillcroft women' whom they had heard describe how 'different it was' later on. I therefore decided to follow up Hillcroft alumnae.

Cycle 6 enabled me to speak with Hillcroft women who had been at university or polytechnic one year, since completing their two year diploma. Up until cycle 6, I continued to adopt a lifelong learning focus, encouraging the adults to compare and contrast prior experiences of learning within and outside the system, of before and now. I also, however, picked up emergent issues, and checked out if and how these felt relevant to others. (Examples of this process will be offered in Section 6)

4.3. Checks on data: establishing credibility and meaningfulness

I was concerned to ensure that participants in the study had the opportunity to reflect on meanings and interpretations, from new vantage points. Recycling data back to a subsample of respondents is seen by Reason and Rowan (1981) to be essential in research that is to be liberated from positivistic constraints. Lincoln and Guba see checking with participants as central to satisfying that the data has 'truth-value' (1985) (I deal with this issue in detail at the end of this Chapter.)

4.3.1. Cycle 7 follow up of Hillcroft women from cycle 5

In Cycle 7, I followed up women whom I had seen previously at Hillcroft. Since I had a great deal of material on their prior lifelong learning, these interviews enabled me to focus in more depth on how conceptions and expectations of learning were influenced by time and experience of other higher education contexts. I could explore in detail their experience of the transition and the new higher education context. In the latter half of the follow up interview, I gave them the transcript from our previous discussion, which enabled us to reflect upon new meanings and perspectives in relation to an earlier account. I could also test out how they responded to issues which had emerged from previous cycles.

4.3.2. Cycle 8

Cycle 8 involved two approaches to checking for credibility and meaningfulness. The first entailed checking back with participants on my final cross-case, cross context analysis. The second checks occurred with adults who had not participated in the study. Details of study participants who were followed up are indicated in the above tables. Six responded in writing. Two by telephone: Janice and Godfrey. Janice also spoke on Bill's behalf, whom she had since married.

5. Methods of data collection and recording

In this section, I focus particularly on how I chose to collect and record data from the eight research cycles. In the subsequent section, I address processes of meeting and talking with students.

5.1. Accessing meaning: life story interviews

I wanted to explore the lived experience of adult learners in a variety of different contexts over their lifetimes. I was not seeking a 'literal truth' nor an account of the outcomes of their learning experiences in terms of achievement, but rather a deeper understanding of their meanings for learning and being a learner, and how these had been shaped by prior experience.

I decided that the most appropriate method for my data collection was a life story approach, akin to a focused depth interview. I decided that this would enable me to better understand, the lifelong context which had shaped the perceptions, experiences, and meanings of adult learners who had returned to formal learning contexts.

I chose to approach the interview in a way that can be described as focused, yet 'unstructured'. I invited the interviewee to retrospect on his or her experiences and meanings of learning, "through his or her present-day construct system." (Tagg, 1985) In accord with Bertaux, I planned to use the life story approach on the basis of a concept of diversity: in other words, I intended to interview a range of differing respondents in varying learning situations. He argues further that the research product resulting from the life story approach affords a powerful instrument for insight and social change, when interviewees perceptions and meanings are allowed to dominate over those of the interviewer (Bertaux, 1980 in Tagg, 1985). Like de Marina, I was looking for themes that underpinned different kinds of learning situations, and how these themes seemed to be at issue in interviewee's accounts of returning to formal education:

"It is an investigation both of [...] concepts of self and significant others at particular time-slices and, more importantly, concepts of change processes." (based on personal

correspondence between de Marina and Tagg, 1981, cited in Tagg, 1985)

My general interests and concerns were conveyed through a letter of introduction (to be discussed in the next section of this Chapter). My approach, however, enabled me to remain free to appraise the meanings of emerging data in relation to my research focus, and use the resulting insights to formulate questions, so as to develop implications of the data.

The material from the 35 ^{people involved in} life story ^{and follow-up} interviews across Cycles 1-7 provides the backbone to the analysis presented in Part II.

5.2. Group interviews

I also interviewed people in small groups, as documented earlier in this chapter in the tables. Most of my group interviews were carried out at Cityside. There I saw 14 people in groups, eight of whom were also interviewed individually. Group interviews were also held with the four women on the Hillcroft returning to learning programme in Cycle 5, two of whom were followed up in Cycle 7. In Cycle 6, I saw the three women both in a group for several hours, and later individually.

Group interviews have their limitations, as Watts and Ebbutt point out:

"...[they are] of little use in bringing intensely personal issues to the surface, or points where the interview has to probe an interviewees perceptions with a succession of follow-up. The dynamic of a group denies access to this sort of data. " (1987)

The group, however, did provide in some cases an important point of departure with certain individuals, generating a map of key themes which I could elaborate later through a depth interview with one individual. The group interview also provided a valuable means whereby I could follow up issues which had arisen in individual interviews, and from data analysis. Moreover, those whom I was able to interview both individually and with others offered a powerful

combination, particularly in encouraging people to open up to me on different levels.

5.3. Written material

In cycle 1, I also gained access to learners' experiences and meanings through written material, provided by 6 students in one department at Cityside, and one student in another, as summarised previously in Table 1. This material was written at the beginning of their course, and entailed a consideration of their learning goals and expectations from another angle in time. This more public statement provided an interesting contrast with the more private expectations and hopes that were shared with me individually in the interviews. In the former, career goals and tasks are emphasised, whereas from the individual interview emerged more of the complexity of these learners motivations, hopes, fears, struggles. The latter gave me greater access to the personal meanings that they attached to life experiences prior to entry that they had recorded in the written material.

5.4. Participant observation generating 'talk'

Themes and issues for further exploration or challenge were also generated by, for example, seminars, a two day course conference, and conversation in student areas at Cityside; meals and breaks at Hillcroft during Cycle 5; during follow up phone conversations.

As Walker suggests, participant observation need not entail total immersion: "Participant-observation can vary along a continuum from complete participation through participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant to complete observer." (1985, p. 6)

Outcomes of this kind of participant observation were generally recorded as part of the field record, either during or after conversations, when new themes relevant to my broad focus were generated, or when issues arising from the interviews were further

illuminated or challenged. The summary tables identify those students whose 'talk' contributed to the final data analysis and reporting in Part II.

5.5. Fieldnotes: reflexivity in practice

From the beginning, I kept a record of impressions, reflections, observations, methodological notes and analytic memoes, as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). This critical reflection on myself was, as indicated earlier, a central value in the research. This process also assisted the process of continuing data analysis, as discussed subsequently in this chapter.

5.6. Recording data

At Cityside, all interviews, barring the last one with Fran and Georgette, were transcribed by hand. All remaining interviews entailed my detailed notetaking, but were also tape-recorded and later transcribed, incorporating reflexive notes as indicated above.

I had confidence in my recording ability, developed over many years of listening intently during depth interviews, while taking notes. I have a style of note taking that is unusual, in that I am able to capture the majority of what is said. A review of my notes soon after an interview also enabled me to translate my handwriting and fill in gaps based on a few cryptic notes.

My pattern of data recording and analysis at Cityside began with scribbles, representing the core of what was said in the person's own words. In one case, I used a very small portable and silent typewriter in a depth interview with three who were close friends with each other, and one of whom I knew socially (Godfrey, Janice and Bill). We agreed that, if it intruded, for myself or them, I would stop. (This did not prove a problem, but it was awkward for me, and I chose not to use it again.) After the interview, on the way home, I would translate my notes, making additional scribbles, which both fleshed out any gaps. At this time, I made a note of observations, reflections, thoughts arising during the interview. Then, within

2-3 days of the original interview, I would transcribe the interview and scribbles, adding additional thoughts and methodological notes. Whereas during Cityside, I incorporated most of my memos and reflections into the actual transcript, I later put all memos on pink cards. Appendix 5 provides an example of the field record, and the kinds of memos I would write after an interview.

6. Meeting and talking with adults in different formal learning situations

6.1. Getting Started: role and values of my letter of introduction

During my initial contacts with course tutors at Cityside, it was suggested that I write a letter of introduction that could be distributed to appropriate 'non-traditional students'. (This is provided in Appendix 6.)

At Cityside, although the ways in which I met students and arranged interviews differed in each department, my letter became a way of reaching more people, freeing me to operate independently from my staff contact. Students often came up to me, and said that they had read my letter. The comment was often, 'Interesting!' I also realised later that by virtue of being explicit and open about my starting assumptions, I helped to relax people.

In cases when I met students in other ways, and they had not yet seen my letter of introduction, I would give it to them as a basis for asking them if they wished to participate in the research. Alternatively, I would use it as an orientation to the interview - allowing sufficient time for them to read it through.

My letter of introduction enabled participants in the research to clarify my purposes, and check out whether they were willing to participate. In it, I tried to convey the stance I wished to communicate in my role as a researcher: that I hoped to do research with people rather than on people and in ways that were open, rather than secretive. I was intent on establishing a relationship

based on equality and trust, rather than one riddled with power and mystique. I believed that, only if I were honest, could I expect others to open up their lives to me. I was therefore prepared to be open about my own learning and limitations, the purposes of the research, the areas which I wished to explore and the ways in which I wished to do this.

In subsequent cycles, my meetings with students were more easily arranged through one contact, or directly by myself, as discussed in more detail in the next section. I decided, however, to retain the idea of a letter as an introductory tool, since it had proved so useful at Cityside. I used the same letter of introduction in Cycles 2-6. This is reproduced in Appendix 7. (Cycles 7 and 8, as described previously, and also below, entailed following up those previously interviewed)

6.2.Meeting Students: Cycles 1-6

At Cityside, in three Departments, staff provided the first contact with the students, often distributing the letter as convenient and within appropriate groups of students. In the fourth department, after experiencing difficulties reaching the staff who had been named as contact people by the Head of Department, I used a personal contact with one of the students (Godfrey) as a starting point. He in turn steered me to others, using the letter as an introductory tool.

There consistently seemed to be a great interest in the broad focus of my study, accompanied by relief that my concern was not to evaluate the course in which they were full time students. The latter was often checked out with me, and seemed to be a determining factor in some students' agreement to participate.

The letter also gave those whom I had already interviewed a means of talking about their involvement in the study with others. I would often be approached in a department's social/eating facilities, where I tended to conduct most interviews and spent time chatting with students. Alternatively, I would be rung at home - to my continual

surprise - and be told that 'so and so' had told them about the study, shown them my letter and they would be willing to be interviewed.

Appendix 8 offers two examples from my field notes illustrating some of the patterns that were in operation during this cycle)

The choice of the context for the first cycle of the research - Cityside - and the varied range of four departments - were determined by theoretical sampling guidelines, and to some extent opportunity. After that, a mixture of pragmatic and fortuitous strategies gave rise to the final group of 25 men and women who generated the initial data for the study, who significantly challenged my preconceptions and initial preoccupations, and whose themes determined subsequent theoretical sampling. This mixture of strategies operated throughout the study. However, the ways in which I met with students, once I gained access to a particular learning context, varied across each cycle.

For example, at London University, I passed out my letter of introduction as a member of a seminar group, within which a number had had a five year break from formal education. I was able to make arrangements to meet with four in the end, although more volunteered. This felt a less comfortable strategy than the previous one, since I was not just seen as a fellow student but also as a member of staff who knew the lecturer. I believe this caused some suspicion and discomfort, and led to some not approaching me or persisting with finding a convenient time for the interview.

My contact in Countryshire, the course tutor whom I met through a colleague, distributed my letter to participants on her course, and three women re-arranged their schedules to make time to meet with me after their course session finished at 3:00. (Child care difficulties prevented others from doing this, although she commented on the level of interest in the study within the group).

Peter was someone whom I had come to know as a neighbour. In the course of hearing about his experiences of returning to post-graduate study, and in the context of issues which required further challenge

or elaboration, he emerged as an appropriate person to interview for the study, in order to pursue some particular questions arising from previous cycles.

I had met the Principal of Hillcroft on various occasions, and therefore I approached her directly about conducting interviews with students. She and her Administrator in turn distributed my letter of introduction. They then arranged a two day schedule of student interviewing and informal discussion with staff and students.

In Cycle 6, when I was concerned to follow up women who had left Hillcroft the year before and had gone on to polytechnic and university, the Administrator again took the initiative and wrote to alumnae, sending a copy of my letter of introduction. Many wrote back or phoned, expressing their interest, and a number tried to come on the arranged day, although in the end I saw three women, first in a morning group interview and subsequently individually, for at least 90 minutes.

6.3. Following up students: Cycles 7-8

6.3.1. Cycle 7

In cycle 7, through the Hillcroft Administrator, I wrote to students whom I had seen previously. (See Appendix 9) They were invited to return to Hillcroft for the follow up interview, thus also offering the opportunity for a reunion. I then met with each of them individually.

6.3.1. Cycle 8: Checks with study participants

Cycle 8 checks for credibility and meaningfulness occurred both through systematic planning and opportunity. Firstly, I met with Karen and Sally who had participated in cycles 5 and 7. I sent them a draft of a journal article written during the initial stages of final data analysis (Weil, 1988). We met for three hours to discuss this. Parts of this recording are seriously marred, due to a flaw in the recorder which persistently recurred ^{during the} interview. I did a transcript by

hand of key notes from all audible sections, and also wrote notes and reflections on this interview immediately following its occurrence, knowing that there had been recording difficulties. I shall refer to this check as 8i. The second (8ii) entailed preparing a draft summary of key cross-case, cross-context themes and out comes from the final analysis. This was organised around the emergent conceptual formulation of disjunction-integration, and structured under the headings used for Part II. This package (Appendix 10) was sent to nine participants whom I was able to track down from various cycles, accompanied by the transcript of our interview(s) and in the case of Janice, Godfrey and Bill, a copy of my 1988 journal article.

My concern in this cycle was to find as many people as possible, who had participated in the original study. This proved not unproblematic. For example, many Cycle 5 and 6 contacts had come through the Hillcroft administrator and understandably, she felt unable to release personal details for me to follow them up. Fortunately, I had taken the telephone numbers of some and they in turn had kept in contact with some of the others. But, for example, Susan, Victoria and Penny were now involved in break-ups with their partners, as I learned from Karen and Sally, and I was reluctant to put any pressure on them. Sally tried to track down some others for me, but was unsuccessful. Many of the telephone numbers I had had from Cycles 1-3 proved to be defunct. Ethel gave me Georgette's new number, but I consistently had no answer. Jane, having left her course, had no links with the others. Therefore, attempts to follow people up systematically were thwarted by life's vicissitudes. However, everybody I could track down, based on the investment of a reasonable amount of effort, I did. Moreover, everyone responded in some way: six (Peter, Jane, Ethel, Karen, Sally, and Connie) in writing; three (Janice, Bill and Godfrey) by telephone, with Janice speaking on Bill's behalf, as they had since married. I feel, however, I had a good cross-section of participants, representative of those who participated in the study overall. I keenly regret, however, my lack of systematic recording of phone numbers; moreover, perhaps I could have kept in touch over the intervening period more regularly, so that I had some sense of movements resulting in out of date phone numbers. This learning, however, will be applied in future studies.

6.3.3. Cycle 8: Checks with non-study participants

Three subsequent checks for credibility and meaning took place with adults who had not participated in the study, and arose out of opportunities which presented themselves during the final period of writing. The first involved me in a 4 hour workshop with students on an M.A. programme at a university (8iii). This programme positively discriminates in favour of admitting students who left school with few or no qualifications, and especially men and women from different ethnic and social class backgrounds. A course tutor had heard of my work, and contacted me since there had been a great deal of difficulty and dissatisfaction, including a number of drop outs, during the past two years. This tutor felt that my work would help to clarify the nature of the problems, help students work through their wider meaning in terms of themselves as learners, and offer ways of moving forward, both for individuals and tutors. Draft writing from the thesis and activities based on the disjunction-integration formulation which organised the final analysis (as discussed subsequently below) provided the framework for that seminar (Appendix 11), and in addition, the 1988 journal article was sent out in advance. Notes of this seminar, and the responses of the 12 participants, were recorded on the train journey home.

The second opportunity to check meaning and relevance came with the invitation to run a seminar on a Hillcroft alumnae weekend with women aged approximately 30 to 80 years from many different backgrounds, most of whom had had experience of more than one formal learning context following their time at Hillcroft (8iv). This discussion was tape-recorded.

Finally, in the summer of 1989 at an International Conference in Australia, I had the opportunity to meet someone ('D') with whom I had discussed my study two years previously. A European man, from a working class background, a former mature student himself and now an academic specialising in adult education, he works with many adult learners in disadvantaged areas on community education and development programmes. I gave him some excerpts from the thesis, and he wrote

several pages of reflections on the meaning of my study for him personally. (Appendix 12)

6.4. Talking with students

I would often begin the interview by referring to my letter of introduction. This in turn led often to further questions which I welcomed: who was I, where did I work, why was I carrying out this study, what was I going to do with the data? I said that I worked at the Institute of Education, in a Centre concerned with helping academics to become more effective in their role as teachers. I said that this was a growing concern now that the student population and role of higher education institutions was rapidly diversifying and opportunities for continuing education and training were expanding for adults. I explained that although the primary purpose of my research was for my own higher degree, I was intensely interested in the experiences of adult learners, having been a mature student myself and someone who had been concerned with those issues in my work for some time. I would often say that I wished to broaden and deepen my own understanding and practice through focusing on these issues through research. I would also often express my hope that the rich description - about the expectations and experiences of adult learners returning to higher education, and ways in which their prior learning may have influenced these - would prove useful to others. I explained that increasingly, higher education institutions and teachers were concerned to know about learners' experiences so that they might become more responsive to the needs of new kinds of students. I also assured them that I was interested in their experiences as learners generally, in a range of situations, and that I was not there to evaluate their course. This latter comment often gave rise to a sigh of relief.

I believe that the ways in which I responded to the students' questions reinforced the messages I had tried to convey in my letter, since everybody with whom I spoke personally chose to participate in some way - even if only to chat informally, when it proved impossible to arrange an interview.

Sometimes I would begin the interview by asking them how they had come to be a learner in this situation. I would then encourage them to move forward and backward in time, in response to themes introduced by them. My training enabled me to use reflective and active listening skills easily: sometimes repeating a key word; non verbally responding in ways intended to encourage elaboration; writing continually so as not to be seen to be valuing some aspects of their story more than others; checking out meanings; posing open ended questions, such as 'Can you tell me a bit more about that?' 'What did that feel like?' 'Tell me about some positive teachers you experienced as a learner' 'Why do you think they were positive for you?'

As I interviewed many students across different contexts, I realised how conditioned we are to think of learning in terms of 'good and bad' students, 'achievement and failure. Students would often begin with these assumptions in mind, almost testing to see if what I said was indeed true. When I would re-affirm, either explicitly or through probing, that I was genuinely interested in the wider issues indicated in my letter, participants seemed to become more able to shift their focus to their own meanings, rather than on achievement and failure. At this point, we often shifted into a different pace and flow, in terms of our interaction.

Individuals who spoke chronologically often began with their transition from home to school, discussed in Chapter 4 in Part II. At Cityside, I encouraged students to find their own pathways around my governing focuses, and chose to be deliberately broad. They were, however, often pre-occupied with their current experience, and I would deliberately probe in order to surface their interpretations and meanings in relation to this experience, or when they first returned, as compared with others. Increasingly, I found Tough's clear conception of 'learning project' difficult to work with, and I gradually began to encourage them to speak about learning not just in relation to nonformal or self-managed activity, but also in relation to learning generally within their lives. In other words, I became increasingly open to their meanings of learning, albeit often tacit, rather than my pre-determined ones. This enabled me to access other

dimensions of experience that were obscured by a focus on more organised activity. This will become evident in Part II.

In groups, I would often begin by asking them how they had come to be in this current situation as a learner. The point of transition would surface all sorts of dimensions, and I could encourage them to reflect back in time, and then forward again to their experience of that formal context quite fluidly. Most of my group interviewing was done at Cityside. Subsequent group interviewing was almost always supported by individual interviewing, since I found it difficult to get beyond the experience of the current course in such situations. But in the first cycle of the research, themes generated by group interviews added to the complexity of the pictures being revealed through individual interviews.

As discussed previously, research at Cityside caused me to pose social class as a question mark to see if, by so doing, alternative dimensions of learning experience I had not previously considered might emerge. I increasingly became systematic about asking explicitly at some stage in the interview how they saw themselves in terms of class. I would try to time this question to tie in either with something that the person said that made it seem relevant, or in the latter stages when I felt that it wouldn't jar the comfortableness that was so critical to the sharing process.

After Cityside, my deliberate use of a Kellyan approach, used in repertory grid work, served as an additional means of focusing, and eliciting meanings related to how students interpreted their experiences as learners and of learning at different times of their lives in different kinds of learning situations. For example, I would ask questions such as the following:

'Tell me two ways in which you consider your experience at secondary school to be different and one way to be the same in relation to you as a learner at this time in your life. '

'What are some of the ways in which learning in that women's group feels the same or different from learning in a seminar group with that particular teacher here?'

Further examples of my kinds of my questioning approach , related to the governing focuses of the study and themes that emerged along the way, will become evident as part of the field record reported in Part II.

As I developed in my own epistemological clarity, I also became more explicit about the kind of research I was engaged in. My gradually developing understanding of the values embodied in post-positivist research also led me to be more forthright about checking meaning and participants' experiences of me as the researcher and the approach I was taking. For example, I tended to conclude the interview by asking participants about their experience of it. I also became more explicit about how in each cycle of the research I was concerned to pick up particular focuses, based on themes arising from previous cycles. I was uneasy, however, about not prematurely shutting down on new complexities and dimensions of experience in the lifelong context that might still emerge. On such issues I also increasingly began to seek information directly from participants. (Appendix 13 provides some examples of this increased directness, and my attempts to balance my interest in emergent issues with an openness to their issues.)

Looking back on Cityside, from later vantage points, I believe that introductions by one student to another came easily because what I was doing was perceived as personally meaningful to those who participated. I was addressing themes and issues that, although these adults may not have thought explicitly about them before, nonetheless struck chords in relation to their experience as learners, in immediate and previous environments. Throughout the study, people spoke about how helpful the interview had been for them personally. On several occasions at Cityside and Hillcroft, I overheard students saying to others, such as in the cafeteria, or student lounge, that I was 'o.k.' I understood this to mean that they had no reason to believe that I had either the opportunity or interest in breaking confidentiality, such as with staff. I believe also that they welcomed and indeed trusted the fact that I was looking at many students and not evaluating their course per se. Finally, it seems that they experienced me as genuinely interested in them as people. (Appendix 14 provides an example from the field record of how the

process of the interview could tap very meaningful and often unexpressed concerns, as well as the values of a stance that emphasised 'research with' versus 'research on' people.)

Voice 2: My own experiential learning had made me well aware of the conditions under which I personally had felt neither able or willing to communicate my meanings and my experience to research interviewers. For example, when I had been interviewed by a researcher who tiptoed around honest direct communication for fear of tainting the 'data' with bias, I too had tiptoed on the safe periphery of my own beliefs and meanings. When theory or hypotheses implicit in an interviewer's questions or questionnaire had clearly been determined a priori, I could often glean the parameters within which my own views would be interpreted. In such circumstances, I have either chosen not to participate or decided to 'play the game', doing the latter only when the consequences of doing so were not personally compromising. Under some research circumstances, I had experienced what it was like to be restricted in the exercise of choice. For example, I had on several occasions been the unwilling victim of lecturers who expected their students to become subjects in research experiments. To refuse, or to question the underlying assumptions in that research, entailed challenging the implicit power relationships operating in that learning context. I was seldom prepared to be open and honest about my own perceptions in such conditions. Instead, I as subject would often cover neat forms with my queries about the basic assumptions underpinning the research, since at least I was usually guaranteed anonymity!

Although I was subsequently to understand better why I had intuitively resisted certain approaches, at this stage in adopting a particular kind of stance as an interviewer, I was drawing on my felt knowledge born out of experience, and the legitimation provided by qualitative-quantitative debates in the disciplines which were germane to my inquiry. I felt confident in my ability to build relationships with research participants that would lead to a more valid and honest communication than I believed possible under traditional research conditions. I believed that valid data could emerge from a relationship based on trust, and my genuine interest in others' own meanings and experiences. It was not until Cycle 5 that I came across the notion of 'trustworthiness' in relation to post-positivist research (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lather, 1986) (to be discussed in the final section of this chapter). In the early cycles, however, I was trying to act in a way which had 'value resonance' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) with how I tried to be as a person and as an educator, and with what I had understood to be the central values in qualitative research. Moreover, my own experience of working in and on areas of oppression had taught me that - either intuitively or consciously - if my stance as a researcher was experienced as a further exercise of my power, or as that of an authority or expert 'doing research to others', little self disclosure was likely. As Oakley (1981) says, "interviewees are people with considerable potential for sabotaging the attempt to research them." In the latter stages of the study, when I was

(voice 2...)

interviewing only women (initially through circumstance, and later through choice), I was to develop a far deeper appreciation of the implications of Oakley's meanings.

7. Continual and Final Data Analysis

7.1. Analysis of Cityside data

My style of analysis throughout these cycles was essentially heuristic and inductive. In other words, theoretical constructs had evolved out of the constructions offered by Cityside research participants and continual critical reflection on my initial governing focuses, preoccupations and emergent issues. They in turn were challenged, elaborated, and refined by subsequent cycles.

Data analysis during data collection allows for a, "constant interplay between the observation of realities and the formation of concepts, between research and theorising, between perception and explanation." (Bulmer, 1982, p. 38)

The impact of Cityside was such that I felt compelled to communicate about it in some way, if only to enable me to make better sense of it. Over the summer of 1985, my initial data analysis led to a draft paper summarising the key themes that had emerged, for an August conference of the British Educational Research Association. I also planned to write it up properly for the SRHE conference on Continuing Education in December, 1985.

I approached my first task by systematically reviewing my field notes, that incorporated full notes of the interviews, and entries such as the above. I began to get a feel for the kinds of prior lifelong learning influences that raised key questions, and indicated a need for further data collection. I also examined various interview/field notes in depth, making notes about the kinds of key themes relating to learner experience suggested under the broad headings: 'initial school years'; 'learning and being a learner

after initial education' ;and 'returning to higher education' and 'higher education'.

I then took an entirely different approach. I selected a fairly random sample of interviews (10) across the departments, and cut up photocopies of the field notes into chunks of meaning. I then sorted these chunks into clusters, guided by links that seemed conceptually and intuitively connected. Three main clusters emerged, as yet unnamed. I then typed up key phrases from the transcript excerpts, indicating the initials to whom it referred, and printed out the full range for each of the three clusters. I then went through each cluster and jotted down 'codes' that seemed appropriate. By this time I was using words such as, for example: alienation/conflict; discovery; Perry (indicating a particular issue about how knowledge is viewed, arising from my earlier reading as discussed in Chapter 1).

I then read through interviews that had not been treated in this 'sort', and came up with new categories, with 'learner identity' emerging as a significant issue. I then went through the interviews and typed out excerpts relating to those themes.

In later stages, when I had full access to a word processor, I systematically coded the departments and each set of field notes from Cityside. Ultimately, each was broken down into 'chunks of meaning' and pasted onto cards.

The process of writing an initial summary of key issues in the data further challenged my thought processes. At this early stage I discovered the essential value of writing to the progression of a qualitative study, and continuing data analysis as a means of sharpening and testing outcomes: something often referred to by qualitative researchers (e.g. Lofland, 1971; Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). Nonetheless, during the writing of both of these papers, I would often lurch from total uncertainty to blinding clarity, only to lose touch again with the tentative conceptual frameworks that were emerging.

7.2. After Cityside

The word processor was a distinct advantage after Cityside. Each transcript would be typed up and then chronologically divided into self-contained chunks of meaning, each with a page number indicating its location in the original transcript. This was in preparation for the final analysis when all field records/interview transcripts and memoes were to be cut up and put onto 4 x 6 index cards).

Analysis in cycles 2-7 took many different forms. Overall, it comprised listening to tapes, and reviewing transcripts; examining commonalities and differences emerging from the continual analysis afforded by the field record/memoing process; reflexively examining and challenging my own experience and assumptions; capturing insights, contradictions and questions surfaced through various activities (such as reading, writing, supervision, the production of progress reports each year, personal development work) in the form of, for example, entries into the research record and memoes.

Miles and Huberman (1985) capture the process aptly: "Analysts don't march through data collection as in survey methodology; they scout around, sleuth, and take second and third looks."

7.3. Final analysis: returning to the data with re-vision

In the summer of 1988, I engaged in the major cross-case, cross-contextual systematic analysis that took account of all data, including theoretical and methodological notes kept along the way. All tape transcripts and field notes were cut up and pasted onto index cards, with no deletions. Each card had a number enabling me to trace it back to the original transcript. I then deleted those that compromised confidentiality concerns. I also sorted theoretical, reflective and methodological notes into separate piles as well as cards relating to 'beginnings and ends' of interviews.

When I examined particularly the data from the earlier cycles of the research, like Marshall (1986) , I too felt, "strange returning after so much personal change" (p. 203) and after a "separation in time and

perspective" (p. 204) from its lived collection. But I experienced the benefits of moving from what Bateson refers to as 'binocular rather than monocular' vision, (1978) in my follow up interviews. I now trusted that my new interpretations and self-awareness would serve me well in the final analysis. I trusted in my ability to hear better what I might have missed before, since many tacit understandings had now been surfaced.

I did indeed discover all sorts of new complexities, to which I had previously remained blinkered. For example, I heard issues to do with gender that I had missed entirely before, and the key conceptual formulation emerged: disjunction and integration. (I discuss this in more detail in the next section) I was struck by the varied range of accounts that conveyed a sense of disjunction that had been surfaced through these interviews, by virtue of having focused on the influences of lifelong learning on their expectations and experiences of returning particularly to higher education. In turn, these contrasted sharply with alternative experiences which suggested a sense of wholeness, or integration on the part of the learner. I began to make new connections with the notion, 'a sense of learner identity and possibility', teasing out the kinds of conditions that seemed to be associated with either one or the other.

I approached this final stage of the analysis with the clear intention of creating an audit trail, as suggested by Halpern (1983, in Lincoln and Guba 1985). In other words, I was concerned that I made it possible through my record keeping and stages of analysis to trace back data to the cognitive maps within which I initially made sense of it, prior to writing, as well as to the original source.

Shuffling and reshuffling of randomly selected piles of data cards led to my decision to organise the data chronologically under the following four headings:

Initial education; learning as an adult outside the system; returning to a formal learning context; experiencing the formal learning context.

These headings, each signifying a chapter, were treated separately from then on. All cards were sorted into the pile to which the 'chunk of meaning' best related.

I treated each chapter in turn. The pile was sorted and re-sorted, with me all the while interrogating the data in order to assure myself of the validity of the 'disjunction and integration' axis of analysis. This became the focal point from which to make sense of the data, across time, across contexts, and within and across the complexities of individual stories.

Some key organising themes mirrored the governing focuses for the interviewing process: as expressed in my letters of introduction and as they emerged along the way out of what had come before. The complexities, and the various sub themes, were grounded in the data.

Since class had emerged as a major signifier of meaning in relation to the disjunction-integration axis of analysis, I then split each Chapter pile by social class, as defined by the interviewee as the one with which they most identified at the time of the study, as discussed previously. (Some, for example, were quite clear that they experienced initial education as a working class person, and the return as a middle class one ; others did not 'feel' that changes in material circumstances had significantly changed their sense of class identity). I separately numbered each pile, putting a '0' in front of the number of the cards which came from people who tended to identify themselves largely as middle class. (e.g. 012; 0126). In addition, I used symbols at the top of each card to indicate gender, 'race', as well as when and where I gathered the data.

Working still within the chapter headings, after these various kinds of sortings, I identified on average 5-6 key themes, to which I gave a letter. For example, for Chapter 6, I coded initially against the following:

- A. Parental Relationships
- B. Relationships with teachers
- C. Coming to Know (Aspects of social identity)

D. Relationship with peers

E. Transitions

F. Learner identity

Each theme was put in the centre of a white A-4 sheet. This became the initial conceptual map, based on my systematically working through the 'working class pile' and recording on each card the letter(s) of the theme(s) to which it most closely related. I would notate onto the relevant theme map(s) the number of the card, the pseudonym name of the person, and a key phrase to trigger my memory. I mapped clusters that seemed intuitively and conceptually related. I also drew lines indicating links within that map and with other maps. An intricate pattern of sub clusters began to emerge.

I then worked through the 'middle class pile', using an A-4 transparency overlay and a different colour pen to record the same process. This approach made areas of commonality and difference, as well as paradoxes and contradictions, readily apparent.

When a number of the organising themes were reflected in a particular card, and thus end up on most of the conceptual maps, I would indicate this against each entry with a green triangle (or CI). These served to signify 'critical incidents' in that person's life as a learner.

These multi-layered mappings formed the basis for my outlines. I often produced a series of outlines, which forced new integrations and separations of themes and sub themes. I would discuss these with my supervisor, who both challenged and clarified my interpretations. I would also continually test emergent frameworks against original transcripts.

The index cards were organised in the aforementioned two sets, each in chronological sequence, and as I wrote, I could quickly locate the card to which the notation on the map referred. In my Introductory Notes to this thesis I have explained the use of citations.

Throughout, I kept notes on how key threads, particularly in relation to 'critical incidents' in peoples,' related to subsequent chapters. Certain cards also spanned different chapters, and I kept a record of which ones had to be considered in subsequent chapter analyses.

Cycle 8 further sharpened my attunement to particular themes, while also leading to my adopting a more tentative orientation towards certain outcomes. (This will be discussed in Chapter 8). Subsequent drafts of part II served to clarify meaning and sharpen my analysis. I now fully understand Lofland's meaning:

"It seems, in fact, that one does not truly begin to think until one concretely attempts to render thought and analysis into successive sentences...For better or worse, when one actually writes he [sic] begins to get new ideas, to see new connections, to remember material that he had not remembered before...One is never truly inside a topic - or on top of it - until he faces the hard task of explaining it to someone else." Lofland (1971)

8. Connecting knowledge 'out there' with knowledge 'in here': focusing the analysis around a particular emergent issue

8.1. Disjunction and integration as a means of making sense of key themes in the data

Over the course of the eight cycles, how I made sense of my own experience as a learner, as well as that of adults with whom I had previously worked, had been significantly challenged, elaborated and enriched. My initial preoccupations with progressive teaching and learning methods and approaches, and my rather simplistic conceptions about what kinds of things were at issue for adults as learners, (and indeed, had been at issue for myself as an adult learner) had been undermined by the stories of black and white working and middle class men and women in different learning contexts. A much larger story about 'disjunction and integration' had emerged, involving dimensions of personal and social identity, and a much elaborated notion of 'learning context'.

A qualitative study, with a theoretical starting point that acknowledges multiple realities, accepts that,

"We always know something already and this knowledge is intimately involved in what we come to know next, whether by observation or any other way. We see what we have reason of seeing. Different persons with different perspectives and different curiosities about the area of investigation will inevitably find different categories with which to structure and make sense of the data. " (Jones, 1985b, p. 58-9

By cycle 7, I came to trust in the richness and complexity of the data in which was grounded a more complex story about adult learning than any with which I had begun the study, and felt that there was sufficient saturation to move towards a final cross-case, cross-contextual analysis.

Along the course of the cycles, I had engaged in a personal journey, which, like my data, had complexity and depth, and represented a story about myself as a learner, learning over time. On a variety of levels, I had struggled to make sense of things that participants' stories raised explicitly and implicitly for me. Throughout, I was concerned with issues of validity and trustworthiness, and made myself as much the subject of research as what emerged from my discussions with adults. My systematic inquiry into the lives of others adults, gradually over time, forced a re-vision. (Rich, 1972) I was eventually compelled to acknowledge, on new levels, ways in which my own issues were inextricably interwoven with my original preoccupations in the study. Women's stories, particularly over cycles 5-7, and in retrospect, also at Cityside, had pushed the boundaries of my own awareness about living as gender. Dr. Salmon's skilled supervision, combined with the Bath conferences, had put personal and social knowing - and struggle - at the centre of my learning.

My own life and work experience had put such things at issue: not just as a mature student and an adult educator, but as an American who had changed countries; as a child who had experienced tremendous pain and risk, but who had used initial education as a safe haven from

such difficult realities; and as a woman who had often unconsciously felt at odds with what was considered normative. My learning from these experiences - some acknowledged, some tacit - was at the heart of my being able to hear particular dimensions in others' stories. My searching questions to them and the complexity of what I surfaced and they trusted me to hear, came from my own deep but undigested understandings.

It took me some time to acknowledge that 'disjunction and integration' - as I eventually chose to call it - was a persistent theme in the accounts. But to allow this issue into my own meaning perspectives about adult learning, and adult learners, confronted me on personal and professional levels. I needed to acknowledge shadows in my own life, as well as my own limitations as a trainer. For example, I had every reason to believe that much of what I had done as a trainer had either compensated for disjunction in peoples' lives as learners, or had enabled them to understand some of its sources in prior educational experiences. I also felt reasonably assured that I had often contributed to a sense of integration, by virtue of my commitment to valuing actively their experiences in different domains, and working with them and this experience in particular ways. The reality, however, was that we live in a complex, messy world in which it is more important to learn how to acknowledge and manage uncertainty, than it is to predict and control it. Instead, throughout early drafts of Part I of this research, I kept stressing how my skills, my insights, my experience as an adult educator had enabled me to gain access to, and then probe the depths of, what the learners in my study were describing. My supervisor gently but earnestly suggested that it was otherwise. The roots of my hearing lay in my own experience. I kept asserting that these things had not really been at issue in my work as a trainer. She wrote the following to me in October, 1987, when once again I was struggling with my writing block:

Field record: We are all implicated (despite our good intentions) in an education and a real life social system which is divisive,

oppressive, fragmenting. We can as individuals only achieve, through struggle, a partial awareness and have to make enormous, and only partly successful efforts to alter our practice. Or do you think this is too pessimistic?

My own intuitive understanding of these things, buried in my own past, enabled me to access these meanings in others' lives, but I had little personal understanding about why I could hear these things and why Cityside participants indicated, by the depth of their sharing, that I could, and just what I was hearing. My own journey of self-discovery, triggered by issues arising from this research and working in a paradigm which emphasised reflexivity, became the spiral which ultimately provided the integrating thread that gave the eight cycles overall personal and wider social meaning.

8.2. Disjunction and integration: operational meanings grounded in my analysis of the data

Each individually distinct learning history was characterised by changing interpretations about what it has meant to be a learner and learn in certain kinds of learning situations within and outside formal education. Disjunction and integration is offered as a conceptual formulation to illuminate patterns that run across as well as within the complexities of individual stories.

Disjunction is not a word either clearly defined or systematically used within educational or psychological literature, although it can occur in discussions of pathology. Disjunctive, however, is used to refer to the notion of parts of a statement, a proposition in direct opposition to one another" (Reber, 1985)

I elected to use the term independently, prior to my discovery of Jarvis' use of the term disjuncture in his sociological account of the situation of adult learners and his discussion of meaningful and meaningless learning, based on empirical work with largely professional white middle class adults. (Jarvis, 1987a, 1987b):

"so long as people's systems of meaning are congruous with their experience, they feel no need to pose questions of meaning. When they experience an 'unknown', then they are forced into a questioning position and this disjuncture is the start of the learning process." (1987a, p. 56)

He tends to use this synonymously with the notion of 'discontinuity':

"For so long as there is continuity between people's own personal stock of knowledge and their self-concept and the socio-cultural milieu that they experience, then they are enabled to perform in an almost unthinking manner." (1987a, p. 78)

His position is that all learning begins with 'disjuncture.' Jarvis, in his use of his term, is taking account of 'any kind of learning', whether it occurs in institutionalised or non-institutionalised settings.

My own use of the term disjunction is, I venture, more elaborated than that of Jarvis', and has a different emphasis. It has also emerged in a study focused on influences of lifelong learning on adults' expectations and experiences of formal contexts. Jarvis suggests that the experience of disjuncture is the beginning for learning, if the person has the opportunity to pursue the emergent questions relating to the gap they experience. The stories of people in this study, however, suggested that the experience of disjunction can curtail possibilities for learning, except when certain mediating circumstances obtain.

The word 'disjunction' emphasises, "disjoining, separation" (Concise Oxford, 1982), acknowledging simultaneously the need to locate psychological knowledge in the social sphere. Salmon (1988) uses the term in ways analogous to my own in her discussion of a study by Tizard and Hughes (1984) of children's experiences of home and early school contexts:

"[The researchers noted that] the nursery school settings, in their furnishings, their books and toys, approximated much more closely to the homes of some girls than those of others. There were clear *disjunctions*, for certain children, between what was permitted or encouraged in the home and school. [...] In the case

of some girls, the priorities of the two worlds were very different. [...]In all this, social class did, of course, play an important role." (1988, p. 51-2, emphasis added)

My use of the notion disjunction captures the sense of feeling 'pulled apart' and 'at odds with' (for example, themselves, their environment, the social situation, the explicit or implicit norms, assumptions and meanings which dominated, etc)) that persistently came through to me in many of the learners accounts of being a learner in particular kinds of circumstances. A sense of disjunction will be seen, in the analysis which follows in Part II, to be associated with multiple and simultaneously interacting realities, rather than cause and effect relationships. Disjunction can be associated with feelings of alienation, anger, frustration and confusion. In this study, it always refers to a sense of fragmentation, and involves issues of personal and social identity as they relate to one's sense of identity and possibility as a learner in a particular social, cultural and institutional learning context.

On the other hand, integration was selected to capture the sense of 'wholeness' that came across in other kinds of accounts of learning in particular kinds of situations. Drawing again on received definitions:

" a situation of cohesion, deriving from consent rather than coercion, between the parts (...) sufficient to make it a workable whole." (Bullock and Stallybrass. 1983)

"Very generally, the process of coordinating and unifying disparate elements into a whole." (Reber, 1985)

The notion of integration, as used in the context of this study, implies a lack of disjoining or separation: in particular, that one's sense of personal and social identity does not feel to be fundamentally at issue, or at risk, in a particular learning environment. Integration tends to be associated with an "all of a piece" feeling and a sense of equilibrium. Integration does not necessarily give rise to learning itself, but rather helps to create the conditions conducive to an individual learner being able and willing to learn in a particular learning situation. In other words,

the possibility of learning in a formal learning situation is enhanced. A sense of integration need not be associated with intensely positive feelings. The notion of integration will, however, also be used in reference to situations characterised by enhanced feelings of self-validation. Moreover, in this study, learners convey how a sense of integration can heighten their capacity to manage disjunction that may be entailed in processes of significant learning and restructuring of one's belief systems.

In this study, the notions of, "enhanced integration," 'integration as special reserve' , integration as equilibrium, and integration as compensation for prior experiences of disjunction will be given meaning, through the stories of study participants.

9. On validity, trustworthiness and arbitrariness

From the beginning of this study, I had an intuitive sense of responsibility in relation to the overall challenge of qualitative research to operate all the while with self-awareness. In latter stages of the research, through the Bath conference, I was introduced to issues of trustworthiness and validity in post-positivist or 'new paradigm' research (Lather, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Marshall, 1986). As Marshall argues,

"We need to re-cast the traditional concept of validity to apply it productively to new paradigm, qualitative research. We certainly need to detach ourselves from any notion that validity tells us 'how true' any piece of research is on anything like an objective scale of truth. Validity instead becomes largely a quality of the knower, in relation to her/his data and enhanced by the use of different vantage points and forms of knowing - it is, then, personal, relational and contextual. It requires continual creation and attention as research proceeds, and is always relative, sufficient to some purpose. " (1986, p. 197)

Marshall (1986) and Reason (1988) place particular emphasis on this quality of knowing, and the vital importance of paying explicit attention to how we know what we know. Marshall (1986) suggests that particular concerns include the extent to which awareness, and

reflexivity are seen to operating with respect to the following: in the conduct of the research; in the researcher's relationship to the data; and in relating outcomes to wider contexts. Most importantly, she stresses that the very process of doing research, develops researchers' "capabilities for knowing." (p. 198) It is particularly the influence of Marshall and Reason, as well as my supervisor, Phillida Salmon, whom I believe have helped me to learn continually about the challenge of such concerns, and what they need to mean in actual practice.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) are concerned with 'trustworthiness', relating this to counterpart criteria in traditional research such as internal and external validity, neutrality and consistency (or reliability). They suggest four alternative ways of thinking about these issues in the context of post-positivist research. With regard to establishing the credibility of findings (internal validity or 'truth value'), I have used persistent observation on a particular issue, negative case analysis, triangulation (multiple methods, data sources and time perspectives), and member checks, as well as additional referential material. With regard to transferability (external validity, or 'applicability') I provide in Part II thick description and a rich data base. With regard to the dependability of my findings (reliability, or 'consistency, replicability') and confirmability ('objectivity'), throughout the final analysis I have kept in mind Halpern's audit trail 'considerations' (1983 in Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Lather (1986) offers four checks on data, in her own framework of 're-conceptualised validity': triangulation; construct validity; face validity; catalytic validity. For her, triangulation, involving multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes, is concerned with seeking, "counterpatterns as well as convergences in the data." (p. 67) In my theoretical sampling, I have tried to do just this, during the course of the eight cycles of the research. She also believes that trustworthiness is dependent upon "systematized reflexivity" through which the researcher shows how *a priori* theory

has been changed by the logic of the data. It is in this respect that Voice 2 serves a key purpose, as has my continual recording of memoes, reflections and process notes.

Face validity emphasises, like Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checks: getting the results back to at least a subset of participants, and refining one's analysis in the light of their comments. Cycles 6 and 7 were directed particularly to that end, offering opportunities to participants to review transcripts from new situational and time perspectives, as well as to comment on the meanings which I was deriving from a number of adults' stories.

Lather's fourth concern is that of 'catalytic validity', in which she also draws on Reason and Rowan (1981). By this she means the extent to which the research contributes to self-understanding and self-determination on the part of participants. This was not an intended outcome, but cycles 7 and 8, and subsequent encounters with adults who have read articles based on the research, have persuaded me that this research goes some way towards fulfilling the catalytic validity concern. Final publication of the study will offer a more viable test of this criterion.

Finally, I have tried my best to be critically reflexive, rigorous, and objectively subjective, throughout, reflecting my own learning and development in relation to becoming a post-positivist researcher along the way. In Chapter 2 I spoke about perception determining beliefs, in the sense of Bateson. In this study, I, as the researcher, was, "centrally located along with others in the discovery of (...) meaning." (Weiser, 1987, p. 103-4). This involved me in questioning, and re-structuring, some of my most fundamental perception-determining beliefs, with regard to adults learning, and particularly with regard to my own sense of personal identity as a learner and as a woman.

The struggles entailed in this journey will continue to be made transparent in Part II. But in keeping with the central values and

assumptions inherent in a post-positivist study, I wish to acknowledge that the categories, and formulations which frame the analysis presented reflect the essential dimensions of my own personal sense-making, and reflexivity and my own attunements to study participants' stories. Other people might have organised the same data quite differently. I make no pretence of offering generalisations or pure and universal categories. Nor is my aim to dull the rough and complex edges of an individual's meanings about learning and being a learner over time in different kinds of situations. I therefore offer the analysis presented in Part II from the position that Marshall (1981) has aptly captured:

"It's *my* translation, what I have found and interpreted from the data. My bias is something I appreciate, it's part of me as a researcher. And while it is important for me and for others to recognize my bias, it really is what I can give as a researcher, it is my contribution, and it's coherent, and it's felt and it has all these other qualities which make me value it more than a detached attempt to be objective. I work from a particular position; I appreciate other positions, and I feel that each has its own integrity and its own validity."

I now turn to my presentation of my interpretations and analysis of key themes that weave through study participants stories, all the while seeking to illustrate how a qualitative study can,

"surprise us, and if not generate alternative accounts of reality, at least question, comprise, negate or force revision in our existing accounts. " (Willis, 1980, p. 74)

PART II

EXPLORATIONS

CHAPTER 4

DOMINANT THEMES AND CONCERNS IN ADULTS' RECOLLECTIONS OF LEARNING DURING THEIR SCHOOL YEARS

1. Introduction

In this chapter I consider three key interrelated themes in adults' recollections of their early school years. The first relates to their experiences of different meanings for learning, at home and at school, and how these could give rise to a sense of disjunction or integration, depending upon the extent to which there was a continuity of meaning between the two learning contexts. The second theme concerns how adults in the study recalled relationships with teachers, and the impact of these relationships on their experience of learning and their emerging identity and self-esteem as learners. The third theme relates to how these adults' experiences helped to shape their awareness of social differences, and their sense of possibility as learners. These themes will be seen to weave together during the school years, to shape particular meanings and expectations about learning as well as personal and social identities as learners -the influence of which extend beyond the school years.

As discussed in Chapter 3, I included the influence of initial education as a focus in the interviews, since this had been alluded to so frequently by the working class women with whom I had worked previously. However, unlike my focus on 'learning outside the system', where my dominant preoccupations lay, (particularly in terms of their experience of alternative teaching and learning methods) here I was concerned to know more generally about how they remembered their schooling, and teachers during that period, and how their subsequent expectations as learners were influenced by these experiences. Also, since my interests were in what it means to learn and be a learner outside and inside formal education, I encouraged them to compare and contrast their experiences within and outside school. I was overwhelmed by the power of the accounts, and continually surprised by the complexity of issues emerging in relation to my limited governing focuses. I thus maintained this focus

explicitly throughout the cycles of the research, probing in the three key areas below in hopes of either challenging or clarifying what had emerged at Cityside from alternative perspectives.

2. Learning and being a learner inside as compared to outside school

2.1. Meanings and expectations of learning: the same or different?

Some very complex patterns were in evidence relating to assumptions about learning, its purpose and meanings, and how different locations for learning, such as the family or school influence these. Particularly working class women felt a sense of disjunction between meanings and purposes for school learning as opposed to life learning. I tried to tease out study participants' recollections of whether and how they had experienced that separation, and what that had meant to them as learners.

For example, Ethel said that she had, "never regarded school as a learning place. Learning took place on the street, or at home, in life. You went to school to get peace, to get out of the way." (I, 6: 59/10) Similarly, Nancy saw learning as something that happened, "just through living", not as something that was just tied up with school. She spoke about doing things with her three siblings, how they would, "muck in together." (V, 6: 60, 5) Fran spoke about how her father was a plumber and that there were no books in the house. For her, learning meant, "painting, decorating and practical things (...) Learning was life. Exciting." She speaks about how she coped with the contrast with school learning which was, "boring." Referring to how she was not a pretty girl, she spoke about having decided to manage this by becoming "quite a personality" and not conforming. She remembered the class being asked who wanted to become a teacher, and how everyone put their hands up except her. She could not think of anything worse. (I, 6: 90/17)

Janice, the only Black woman in the study to be interviewed at length, spoke similarly about how learning outside education felt more relevant to her as a person. She was concerned with,

Field record: "... trying to find the place where you fit in as well. With education, school, education can have a blinkered look. Learning to pass exams. Push out what you took in. The other is much wider. Plus learning things which have wider impact on you as a person. That type of education is better, and has more impact."
(I, 6: 102,6)

In these, and many other accounts from people who identified themselves as working class, learning in the home tended to be experienced as a collective and practical activity, that just 'happened' with people, through living and working together. Learning outside school entailed different processes and reflected different purposes that were often at odds with those of the school and teachers. In one place, you learned through experience; in the other place, you did not. The discontinuity between school and home can thus become a preoccupation, and a source of potential disjunction. (Additional accounts from Derek and Victoria on these themes are offered in Appendix 15.)

For the majority of the working class people in the study, the disjunction between learning for learning's sake, and learning through and for living and working seemed to be exacerbated at secondary school. They recalled their increasing preoccupation with getting a job, which seemed far more relevant. For example, Fran spoke about how school became a prison, "a place where I had to go. After age 10 I decided I wanted to become a hairdresser and everything had to fit into that." She describes how she scraped through in geography because the teacher convinced her that she might someday be a hairdresser in Bahrain or elsewhere overseas. But overall, she spoke about how, she, "couldn't wait to leave. " (I, 6: 87/2). Marion and Diane spoke similarly:

Field record: Marion. "I left school at 15, no qualifications. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR MEMORIES OF SCHOOL? I enjoyed learning up until about 12, and then you suddenly think about all sorts of things, like a job and I didn't really want to stay on. I just wanted to leave and get a job." (V, 6: 85/10)

Field record: Diane. "Once in grammar school, she said she felt increasingly frustrated, since she wanted something that was more vocational and relevant, such as secretarial skills." (I, 6: 36/5)

That school learning was not relevant to life seemed to be less a source of disjunction in middle class adults' accounts of initial education. They tended to speak more about learning through structured activity, and through conscientious 'teaching' by parents aimed at enabling them to 'do well' at school. (Appendix 16.) For example, Peter speaks about coming from a middle class family,

Field record: "... where education was considered very important, where there were lots of books to read and my mother was always pleased with what I had learned and she always enquired and I had to keep them happy and they put a lot of emphasis on doing it for 'your sake.'"

He recalled everything he did at home as feeling somehow related to doing well at school. Peter describes how pleasing parents and teachers was quite, "a strong element."

Amy also spoke about how, for her and in her family, "learning was school and working hard." From an early age, she had internalised the message that until she got qualified and earned her own living and became independent, it was incumbent upon her to do well at school. Organised activity, that supported her sense of achievement, was central to learning outside school.

In the accounts of those adults who regarded their upbringing as largely middle class, learning meant school. Moreover, their homes placed a strong emphasis on doing well at school, and on structured learning activity that was conducive to this. For these adults, the lack of relevance between school and real life was less a source of disjunction than it could be for those who saw themselves as working class, who experienced 'learning' as what one did in the course of the day to day activity of living and working with others. The middle class adults recalled the emphasis placed by their families on the relevance of school to future career choices; they conveyed an innate

sense of responsibility to uphold their position in society through achievement at school. These compensating forces seemed to minimise disjunction arising from any sense of an artificial separation between school and life.

Paradoxes and complexities obviously emerge beyond the class axis of analysis. For example, Patricia subjectively experienced herself as working class. She was, however, retrospectively aware of the fact that her family was deliberately striving to 'become' middle class. She wrote about how from an early age she was aware of Jewish culture, "that there were different cultures and ways of living". Learning for her entailed working in her parents grocery shop, and watching,

Field record: "... my parents work together. In particular what giving support to people can mean. Sometimes it might mean appreciating someone's efforts but it can also mean just rolling up shirt sleeves and mucking in until the job at hand is complete.
" (I, 6: 67/1)

The above accounts suggest the complexities associated with learning at home. Learning that school is not necessarily relevant to living can be critical, and for some a source of disjunction. These experiences will be seen to continue to have an influence, in terms of shaping their sense of possibility as learners, and in creating a willingness (or lack thereof) to manage the disjunctions between home and school. For some, largely middle class adults, 'relevance' was recalled at this stage in their lives as largely a matter of how learning in the home reinforced and supported the kind of learning they engaged in at school. For others, largely working class, the learning-school boundary was recalled as being imbued with various encounters with unfamiliar tacit assumptions about what it means to learn. Their recollections conveyed the sense of disjunction they felt at this age, with regard to what, how and why home learning felt so much at odds with learning at school. It seemed that school forces were gradually shaping needs for integration, in relation to learning outside formal education - a theme that will be traced in Chapter 5. How the school/life boundary is experienced, managed and mediated will continue to have implications for how adults from

different social and educational backgrounds experience a return to the formal education system.

2.2. Home-school intersections and the experience of reading

Many people in the study began their accounts of learning during their initial school years by describing what it was like first to go to school; I then would encourage them to speak about their learning outside formal education in the home. Reading was often offered as an example of how they experienced the intersection of the two contexts, and the extent to which as learners they experienced learning at home and school as at odds, or 'all of a piece'. Reading was described by a number as the first site for experiencing a sense of disjunction or integration in terms of home and school - more often the former than the latter, although I did not probe on the experience of reading generally across the interviews. Accounts from Susan, Janet, Amy, Jane, Penny and Georgette, capture the extent to which reading could place issues about learning and being a learner, centrally, in the home - school transition. (Appendix 17).

Susan and Jane, respectively working class, and middle class, both provide examples of how they felt difficulties in relation to the initial home school transition and the experience of reading, can be recalled as symbolic of major disjunction in terms of themselves as learners, and their experiences at school. They also illustrate other influences that can interact with class dimensions to give meaning to what it means to learn and a sense of possibility to the learner. For example, Susan describes what it was like to cope with the disjunction she felt in terms of being a learner in relation to her parents and her working class community. Her sense of disjunction is therefore heightened by the lack of support she received from home, a theme that will continue to be at issue for Susan for many years. On the other hand, Jane experienced some measure of compensation for the disjunction she was experiencing.

Susan recalled her first encounter with the school around reading as symbolic of her entire relationship with formal education. She could read when she arrived at school; others could not: "It went steadily

down hill from there. From age five plus. It was pure aggravation and I was considered disruptive." Her account has additional meaning and power when considered within the context of her family situation. She spoke about how her parents regarded her as a "freak" because she was a good and avid reader. The isolation she recalled during her initial school years is a characteristic feature of her learning story, as will be illustrated in subsequent chapters.

Like Susan, Jane could also read when she arrived at school. There, she too experienced considerable disjunction, where her sense of terror inhibited her from telling the teachers. She recalled this incident as symbolic of her sense of identity and possibility as a learner in relation to school. "As a result I sat there for the first six months bored out of my mind, and I think that has influenced the whole of my education adversely. " The effect of this experience on her sense of confidence and possibility as a learner was to stay with her for many years, as will be illustrated in subsequent sections. Jane was also concerned with the lack of relevance between life and school, but her account suggests that this disjunction is one that she felt able to deal with in a more matter of fact way than many of the working class adults. This was perhaps also due to the influence of her home life, and the support she received for other kinds of learning activity and for doing well at school.

Amy and Janet both conveyed similar frustrations about the fact that they could read when they arrived at school, but that for them, this capability remain unrecognised or unencouraged. Like Jane, they came from homes where doing well at school, at least in the early stages, was strongly encouraged. The support of parents in their situations seemed to be an important alleviator of disjunction in relation to reading.

Penny, on the other hand, recalls that at some stage, her mother decided she could not read and the impact this had on her own sense of capability as a learner, and her ability and willingness to learn under certain kinds of conditions. The complexities of class and learner identity are further illustrated in her description of her Irish working class mother standing over her, saying things like,

"Look at that word. Get it right. " She spoke about how anxious she still becomes when she is required to be aware of what she is doing, or is being judged. Her difficulties with reading spilled over into maths also, where despite her ability, she remained unable to read word problems. She said, "You imagine you are an idiot as a result. " (V, 6: 131, 6;)

Georgette experienced herself as working class but was aware of how she and her family were seen as middle class by other working class people. Her story suggests an interweaving of various patterns identified above. Her father tried conscientiously to offer her a qualitatively different experience of learning from that which he had during his initial education:" He taught me to learn things for myself, and until I was ten, it was dead easy. " When she went to the local grammar school, she started to fail. She described her sense of disjunction. "On the outside of school was me learning how to live. My dad got me a job when I was 11 and a half. " She goes on to describe all the practical skills she learned from this. But at the same time, "I always loved reading and I had lots of opportunities to read and read and read. But learned from home. I was always privileged with books and comics. "(1, 6: 912/18)

For some, reading was the first site for organised learning, or 'being taught' in the home, particularly for those from middle class backgrounds or homes where there was an explicit concern with upward mobility. Learning to read within, and then across, each learning context, can either generate struggle and confusion, and a sense of disjunction, or excitement, and a sense of integration. But what comes across in these and others' accounts is the symbolic power of reading as a site of struggle in terms of what it means to be a learner at school.

In these initial encounters with school, one can see the extent to which a learner's sense of capability and academic potential, and one's identity as a learner within the school context, begins to be shaped. Relationships with parents and teachers were seen to compound or compensate for disjunctions experienced as a learner at school.

Many of these themes suggested by these accounts will be seen to reverberate with different kinds of meanings throughout these adults' lives. For some, such as Amy and Jane, women who became professionals, compensating experiences in education, to redress the influence of earlier disjunctions come earlier. For Janet and Victoria, who after school married and worked largely inside their homes for many years, as well as Susan, Fran and Penny, integration is to come much later in life, long after they left initial education, and not without considerable pain and struggle to regain a sense of identity and confidence as learners. In these encounters, however, the interpretative frameworks within which learners will continue to make sense of what it means to learn and be a learner within and across different learning contexts begins to be shaped.

3. Relationships with teachers

Few informal teachers, apart from parents, were recalled in connection with learning during the period of initial education. Nor did I probe for this during the school years, except in connection with the home environment. Teachers within school, however, were remembered with striking vividness: their names, their mannerisms, the feelings they generated were still surprisingly fresh in adults' memories. Experiences of particular teachers were further mediated by the feelings associated with a particular classroom or school.

In this section, I explore ways in which teachers and the context for learning were recalled as having either contributed to, or undermined, a young person's sense of possibility as a learner. This theme will be extended in the next section, where I shall focus particularly on interactions with teachers in relation to social differences.

This section interweaves with the other two in this chapter to create a rich and complex picture of learning during the school years, through the perspectives of adults who have experienced learning in a range of learning contexts over their lives. The "inextricable intertwining" of the cognitive and social (Salmon and Claire, 1984)

comes through repeatedly across the various accounts, this emerging as particularly critical in working class adults' recollections.

3.1. Teachers as negative influences

Teachers were recalled as powerful people, to the extent that they could bolster or undermine a learner's fragile self esteem in ways that had repercussions beyond the classroom into adulthood. Adults in the study spoke about feeling capable in one classroom, only to feel 'stupid in the next'. The influence of the teacher was remembered to have raised or lowered the learner's barometer of expectations, and confidence in their capacities. Teachers had the power either to reinforce or challenge labels about oneself as a learner that had evolved through experience at home and school. Jane, Pamela and Susan capture this theme that runs through the data. (Appendix 18)

For example, Jane describes how her performance would swing according to how the teacher viewed her. She describes one teacher who built on the understanding of history that she had gained at home with her father; the next history teacher however singled her out, and picked on her "all the time. (...) And so I went from top to bottom in the course of one year. " Similarly Pamela talked about how one teacher might have felt that they were getting a spark from her as a learner, whereas another would have seen her as, "bloody minded and stubborn and switched off." Susan also talked about performance swings, which she associated with the ways in which teachers handled her strong personality. She too described coming first in Geography with one teacher, and then after switching to O level, failing because she didn't like the teacher. She then talked about how when the Head developed an interest in her, this also influenced other teachers' perceptions, and they started to say, "Susan's bright." But having done well in the 11+, she failed her interview for grammar school, never knowing why, when she thought she had done well. "No feedback", as she said.

Particularly vivid examples of the power of particular teachers come up in relation to maths. The number of women, middle class and working class, who recalled maths not as a subject area in which they were

capable or not, but rather as a battleground, was disturbing. The feelings of inadequacy and anger, long remembered and felt, could be easily re-activated by subsequent learning environments. (Appendix 19)

For example, Rhoda describes being bad at arithmetic, and how this was exacerbated by a particular teacher who hit her: "From then on, I was always bottom of the class." Diane says she had always enjoyed arithmetic, but found algebra and geometry difficult particularly because of an , "old fashioned teacher who was highly sarcastic." She talks about how for her this was a perfect example of how to, "squash a budding learner. I was totally blocked off." Jane describes how a teacher slapped her legs when she couldn't do multiplication and how, "consequently, I am [still] frightened to death of [maths]."

The feelings experienced in such classrooms, combined with the power of particular teachers, seemed to have had a significant impact on these adults' willingness and capacity to learn in particular subject areas during the school years.

Voice 2: After cycle 2 of this study, I met a woman at a conference who was involved in teaching maths to women returners. I mentioned my concern at how frequently this theme was recurring in the accounts. She said that she had seldom met women who did not have some disturbing story to tell in relation to maths. I in turn began reflecting on my own experience of maths, and in so doing, discovered something very interesting indeed. I told her, in response to her gentle probing, how I had always done well at maths, but did not see myself as being 'good' at this area. I therefore made course choices at university that enabled me to avoid maths and statistics. She probed, and said what evidence did I have that I was 'not good at it'. This was unsettling since I recalled that I had consistently received A's and B's for my work in this area throughout my secondary school career. I began to question what had made me act in ways that totally denied the evidence of my own senses. I had been fortunate in the quality of teachers I had had for maths. I was at a girls' school where achievement in maths was valued and rewarded. Nonetheless, I remember 'feeling labelled' as not good at maths. What wider message had I absorbed and why? She then spoke about how she tried to teach maths in ways that enabled learners not just to build their confidence, but to see how what they were doing linked into their experience, as well as into patterns and wholes. I found this interesting, and concluded that she was using a good adult learning approach, by virtue of using their experience actively. What I missed was the essential theme of 'learning in relation' - one that in the final analysis emerged vividly across women's stories, to be developed particularly in Chapters 7 and 8. The data suggested that

the 'feelings' experienced in a classroom, combined with the influence and power of particular teachers, had had a significant impact on these adults' willingness and capacity to learn in this subject area. But reflection on my own experience now causes me to believe that multiple simultaneous forces were giving rise to a variety of disjunctions. For example, was a basic sense of disjunction in relation to maths being enhanced by it being taught in ways that enhanced a sense of fragmentation? How did the power of particular teachers and the feelings generated in particular classrooms combine with wider social forces that shape girls' expectations of their capacity in maths? Many of these questions I could not have raised when I encountered this woman, who opened me up to dimensions and disjunctions in my own experience that I had never considered. But by the end of the study, these were central, in relation to themes that recur across the data.

More generally, these accounts about teachers as negative influences suggest how our identities as learners, and our sense of our capacities can give rise to a sense of integration in one context, but a sense of disjunction in another. Moreover, these interactions do not occur within a social vacuum, as shall continue to be illustrated in this Chapter. The image conjured up for me in so many of the accounts of relationships with teachers is that of sailboats. Some have no rudders most of the time. Others can put the rudder up and down depending upon the nature of the forces being confronted. Others bring rudders from elsewhere, such as at home, to help them to sustain being buffeted about. These memories suggest images of young people for whom the locus of self determination and self-esteem is still largely at the mercy of external currents. The rudder theme will continue to have meaning, once these adults return to formal learning contexts.

Adults reflections on their experiences of particular teachers, and the ways in which they were categorised and their possibilities delimited, are often spiced with loss and regret. Such themes are particularly poignant in the accounts of adults who have since discovered their own potentiality, and speak from the perspective of being a learner in a learning environment which in a myriad of ways bears no resemblance to their earlier experience, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters. But as Susan, who later went to Hillcroft, said in her follow up interview, when she had continued to prove to be a top student at university, "They keep describing me as a later developer. I'm not the late developer. The system is! I always had it,

they just refused to see it or to help me bring it out. " (Follow up interview, 3/4/87)

3.2 Teachers as positive influences

Not all teachers were recalled as damaging, although on average, people tended to identify only one or two 'good teachers' who had encouraged or excited them as learners. I would ask them to elaborate on what 'good' meant for them. (Appendix 20) For example, Penny, whose mother (as discussed previously) had decided she could not read, went to initial and secondary school some miles away where she was seen as middle class, rather than working class. This gave rise to considerable disjunction in terms of her social identity in the village in which she lived. She speaks about how two teachers in particular helped to compensate for this, and contributed to her sense of integration in the classroom. She talks about liking them, and how one of them especially, "didn't appear to be prejudiced towards anybody. And she made learning fun." She conveys a sense of not being able to put her finger on just what it was that they offered her, but she was sure, "these people praised me. I can't remember anything else. " She then went on to Secretarial College where she recalled not meeting people who cared so much. She suggests the loss she felt was associated with the emphasis being placed more on subjects and specialisation, rather than personal involvement.

Similarly, Diane talks about the importance of "caring and her capacity to draw out your potential." She also describes one maths teacher, a man, with whom she was able to experience feeling, "totally at ease" and who gave her the feeling that maths was easy for her: "Everything he did made it interesting for me to learn." Pam says that personality and enthusiasm for the subject were important, but stressed feeling, "on the same wave length and encouraged." She spoke about how the spark was there for her when she, "felt capable of understanding and a sense of achievement. "

Similar meanings for 'good' tend to recur, whatever the adult's social background. Many spoke also with deep appreciation about teachers who they recall as 'seeing' or 'sensing' some potential in

them as young people. The theme of good teachers being able to enter into the learner's world, so as to generate a felt sense of capability and personal involvement, will recur again and again. What comes across vividly is how capability may become associated with a specific subject area (e.g. I am good at maths, bad at history) but this sense of capability is shaped by the cumulative impact of particular kinds of relationships and interactions that either have or have not given rise to a sense of possibility in relation to particular subject areas. When women spoke about teachers who made them feel capable and confident, they often spoke about their experience of that teacher or classroom in feeling terms, and a sense of personal connection and integration with that environment is conveyed. This theme runs throughout the 'learning life histories' and will continue to be developed in Part II.

As confidence grows, many learners will be seen gradually to develop more inner resources with which to mediate situations in which content can take precedence over caring; form and style over involvement. But for many in this study, the need for people who respond personally, with caring, will remain strong for some time, if only to compensate for previous damage.

Darcy, referring to an earlier account of her bad behaviour at school as "cries for help", and how "no one heard" describes here the one teacher who 'sensed something':

Field record: Darcy.[re secondary education] She explained that she eventually took 3 0 levels. During the final part of her stay at secondary, the Deputy Head, "was bribing me to stay. " ...*(He said she could do A-level history without doing an O level.) She paused, and reflected. " I couldn't figure out why. He must have seen something in me. " I, 6: 35/3)*

Throughout these accounts of particular teachers, home influences interweave to heighten a sense of disjunction or integration that serve the learner ill or well at this stage of their lives, and so significantly influence their future life courses. For example, Darcy also spoke about how her, " parents' highest expectations of her would

be that she would pass the 11+ (I, 6: 24/2). The impact of such teachers, such as her Head, was recalled far more vividly when they 'felt' like the only ones who 'saw something' and encouraged them. But when she left in the fourth year, she remembered with sadness how no one else at school, and no one at home, "even bothered to persuade me to rethink." The influence of the Head was too little and too late to counteract the disjunction she experienced in relation to her parents' expectations of her and her intuitive sense of her own capabilities - something she referred to at various points in our interview.

This 'too little too late' theme runs throughout working class adults' accounts of initial education. With insufficient compensating influences, the 'something' that the occasional 'good teacher' discovers and nurtures into hope and involvement, can remain buried for years. Serendipity, combined with personal struggle, may enable them to re-discover their lost sense of possibility as learners in formal education later. Other kinds of influences may help them to learn to trust in their own capabilities, providing them with the resilience to persist in learning contexts.

3.3. Relationships with teachers in the context of 'school'

The power of teachers in their role as authority figures, as well as the ways in which they chose to exercise that power, was not experienced in a vacuum but within the learners' recalled relationship to the school more generally. Experiences characterised largely by disjunction or integration in response to particular institutional settings were further influenced by other circumstances, such as home. For example, as Susan described above, once the Head 'labelled' her as 'bored but bright' at the Junior school, she experienced a subtle shift in the way she was perceived by other teachers and eventually her parents. She recalled this as 'not just attention', but rather as a qualitative shift in her relationship with the school generally. This in turn enhanced her own sense of her capacities, as well as her willingness to respond to that encouragement.

Similarly, Amy spoke about how she too had been 'terrorised by a particular [maths] teacher' at one point in her school career. I asked her to elaborate on what she experienced. Her disjunction here might be interpreted as being between some sense of 'justice' and feeling a victim at the hands of this teacher, but this is counterbalanced to some extent by the overall ethos of the school and the experience of 'good teachers', and the consistent support and encouragement she had from her parents:

Field record:Amy." Sarcasm, ridicule, going too fast. I was much too paralysed to say, 'Hey, I don't understand. ' what else. Balanced by some very good teaching, and the sort of set up where the school was that you worked very hard, very high standards."

Amy had a great deal of support to sustain her through this, from her independent school, her small classes, her popularity in her class and her family. Others experienced similar victimisation, as described previously, but with few counterbalancing influences to compensate for the disjunction experienced. As such, perhaps it was easier for them to internalise these negative influences as being something about their inadequacies as people, rather than a function of a particular interaction, or a teacher they just did not get on with. For those learners, the effect could be far more long lasting, with more far reaching consequences in terms of their life decisions, aspirations and expectations.

The cumulative impact of teachers who have served as either a positive or negative influence can diffuse more generally to characterise the experience of school itself. For example, Victoria speaks about the extent to which school for her was about feeling fearful and that she was a failure. Anything else was a surprise, due to chance, not to something about her.

Field record:Victoria." SO SIXTEEN CAME AND YOU HAD SOME O LEVELS WHEN YOU LEFT? Yeah, I did them. I actually passed, yeah. Absolutely astounded myself. BUT BY THIS TIME YOU FELT YOU WERE A FAILURE? Yes. I'll tell you what they did. Really knocked my

confidence for six. I was just rebellious to cover my fear, I was frightened really." (V, 6: 98/12)

Victoria's story returns in Section 4, where we see how her experience as a working class woman in the context of her school and her relationship with particular teachers was a central factor in her self-labelling and her fear.

Similarly, Sally, Pam, Todd and Rita speak more generally about the kinds of frustrations and anxieties that for them became associated with school (Appendix 21). Sally refers to having a nervous breakdown at the time of the 11+, and consequently having to go to school some distance away from her home. School for her was about feeling terrified of the older boys at the school, the cane, and , "the whole atmosphere of violence". Pam recalls "not a lot of pleasure", and feelings of, "tenseness, competitiveness at having to achieve. " Todd describes his thorough sense of frustration that school had nothing to offer him. School was about restrictions, and about teachers trying to shape him into something he was not. He conveys a sense of having become invisible, since the classes were large and , "they had to put all their attention to control the disruptive kids. Deal with the louder element." Rita talks about feeling as if she were physically handicapped, since school for her was largely about isolation: during games, and from the 'in group'. In so doing, she describes the compensating effects of a maths teacher, even though she, "disapproved of me half-heartedly. (...)" Rita found this teacher's tendency to be straightforward refreshing, and that consequently, "I felt quite safe with her. I trusted her." (Appendix 21).

What is critical across these accounts, however, is that Pam speaks from an overall sense of feeling no disjunction between home and school; nor has she really felt her own sense of identity and possibility to be at risk within the school environment. The others experienced their relationships with school, and what it meant to learn at school as opposed to home, very differently. As such, their identities as learners, and their sense of possibility, seems to have been affected more centrally, as will continue to be shown.

3.4. Relationships during times of transition

Dialogue and understanding, and the need for supportive relationships are of particular importance during times of transition. Teachers can play critically important roles in mediating the disjunction learners may experience as they move from one context to another.

Illustrations of the need for positive teachers, and their critical role during times of difficult transition are given in Raissa's story. (Appendix 22)

Raissa offers her own particular variation on the various themes associated with the experience of transition. As the daughter of a wealthy woman who was a missionary in the Sudan, she grew up in Africa. She had no experience of 'formal education' until she returned to Wales at age ten, thus experiencing a major transition in terms of her own learning life history. Her story also offers an alternative perspective on how the emphasis on experiential rather than organised learning in her upbringing might have been a source of major disjunction, but this was mediated by both the context of the Welsh school in which she began her formal schooling, and the nature of the relationships and expectations which supported her. In particular Mr. Brown played a key role: "He was very kind and for the first time I got a lot of positive feedback." When she moved from the Welsh school to an English grammar school, she experienced real culture shock: "I was horrified when I heard people say to children, "You are not good at that.(...) " By the time of her second transition, however, Raissa seemed to have developed the inner resilience, supported by home and previous positive relationships at school, to cope. In this, she provides a vivid contrast to those adults who will need far more opportunities to repair their damaged self-esteem and sense of identity as learners before they demonstrate the kind of resilience suggested by Raissa.

Other stories about the different kinds of roles that teachers can play in helping students to manage disjunction at times of transition between learning contexts are offered by the stories of Sheila and Jane in Appendix 22.

3.5. Reflections

The overall message in relation to the broad theme of 'relationships with teachers, classrooms and institutional settings' is that there were not many opportunities to counteract disjunction within the experience of initial schooling itself. For some, support for academic achievement outside the school environment did a great deal to help sustain and sometimes enhance, a sense of learner identity and confidence. This in turn seemed to help counteract the impact of any disjunction being experienced at school. But for those without such resources, there seemed to be insufficient experiences characterised by a sense of integration at school to counteract the disjunction they were experiencing overall. What experiences there were - to experience a different kind of reality - seemed to offer a rare and unexpected haven. Even then, particularly for working class men and women, such havens were remembered as only tenuous places for repair.

The complex ways in which adults in this study described how they came to know who they were and who they might be as learners is being shown to be inextricably intertwined with how they experienced their interactions with others during the school years. This becomes even clearer in the next section where adults speak about the interactions that conveyed consistent messages to them about where they were in the social hierarchy. The effects of such messages will be seen to become further integrated into their sense of identity and possibility as a learner.

4. Learning about oneself in relation to the wider social context

4.1. The context for exploring these dimensions of learner identity

The previous section underlines how the process of understanding who one becomes "inextricably bound up with who one is known to be." (Salmon, 1980) This section focuses in particular on how learning during the initial school years can also contribute to a sense of learner identity and possibility that is inextricably bound up with

the structure of social relations in the wider society. We see how wider patterns of injustice and inequality in society itself become mirrored in both the official curriculum and classroom relations.

For many in the study, learning during the school years entailed a great deal of learning about social differences. Accounts in this section reveal another sharply focused dimension to the kaleidoscope of what it means to learn and be a learner at this stage in life, in particular circumstances and particular social contexts. Further influences that can give rise to a sense of disjunction or integration as a learner during the initial school years are made more apparent.

The 'initial school years' for the majority of this study were experienced in England, between 1940 and 1965. (The oldest woman in the study was 55) Approximately two thirds of those who participated in this study identified themselves as working class and a larger proportion were women. A small number were Black. There were also particular cultural differences in the backgrounds of two white people which further illustrate the complexities of coming to know (Salmon, 1980) who one is as a learner in relation to the wider social context: Raissa, daughter of a Welsh woman, who grew up in the Sudan; Vera who grew up in New Zealand and moved to England in her early 20's.

This section further demonstrates how, locating the "definition of learning within the personal subjectivity of learners themselves" may enable us to acknowledge and understand the impact of what Salmon (1988) refers to as the 'substrate of learning'. This is often termed the 'hidden curriculum' by others, but in ways which often neglect personal understanding and meaning. The experience of disjunction and integration in relation to social knowing as explored in this section, will be seen to build upon, and further elaborate, themes and patterns described previously in this chapter. In addition, this section provides the opportunity to consider a core strand of meaning and experience that runs throughout these adults' stories and thus will continue to be at issue throughout part two.

Voice 2: The richness of meaning I have now come to hear and understand in relation to the experience of social differences is developed further in Chapters 5-7. This theme also represents the major domain for my own personal learning and development in relation to this study. This was thoroughly unexpected at the outset of the study. If anything, I would have considered myself to have done a 'great deal of work in this area'! Although the other governing focuses yielded complexities and riches I had never even begun to contemplate, it was in this domain that I was forced to confront many of my own issues.

In my first letter of introduction to participants in the study (See Chapter 3), I said that I was, "-particularly -but not exclusively - interested in speaking with students who feel they have experiences to describe as learners which, either directly or indirectly, you believe have been influenced by your gender, race, class, culture and/or age." In this missive to prospective interviewees, I referred to my own learning, which, with respect to inequality, had been primarily in the area of race. Although I implied equal development in all domains, I realise now the extent to which my understanding of the other areas was more conceptual and at the level of ideological commitment to equality. I had not begun to excavate the painful paths of my own coming to know in relation to gender and class.

I realise now also how in the initial letter of introduction, I myself made an assumption which is so common in these areas : namely, that 'specific experiences' in relation to for example, gender and race, can be reported as discrete entities in themselves, divorced from the stream of life. Much as when a person wishes to take a case to the EOC or the CRE, they are obliged to identify, often at times of immense psychological and social pressure, the specific 'incident that involved discrimination'. It is implied that the incident can be artificially severed from the intricate interweaving of social, institutional, attitudinal, political and relational currents. The 'critical incident' in itself may be seen as minor; what is critical is that it is often the 'last straw': the apex of cumulative despair at which a different form of action becomes imperative.

With my second letter of introduction, having been overwhelmed by the power with which class had emerged in Cycle 1 as central to the lives of those whom I had interviewed (all working class but 3 by this stage), I acknowledged these domains slightly differently:

"I am particularly - but not exclusively - interested in speaking with men and women students whose experiences of learning, and being a learner may have been influenced by their gender, 'race', social class, culture and/or other dimensions of experience/identity. " (emphasis added, Appendix 6)

Here I am beginning to acknowledge the extent to which such domains were emerging as central, not peripheral, to the whole subjective experience of being a learner. I had also begun to become aware of how themes of identity, rather than progressive teaching and learning methodologies, were at issue. Having committed myself to an 'evolving design' and non-defensive science, as discussed in

Chapters 2 and 3, I was obliged to pursue the data where it led me.

In this chapter, themes emerged that led me to acknowledge how much my own initial education enabled me to understand implicitly about how class differences in America can operate: more subtly than Britain but nonetheless, powerfully, particularly in terms of a young person growing up and learning in formal education. I had obscured the edges of these painful experiences, interpreting them through a cultural ideology that emphasised 'classlessness' and on the basis of the normative assumption, "children can be cruel." I realise now how many structural barriers were put in my way as well. Themes that emerge in these adults' stories also helped me to consider my own experiences of 'bumping up' against the British class structure as a 'foreigner', when I least expected it. Like Marshall,

" This personal involvement provides the energy for the research, heightens my potential as a sense maker and means that research has relevance to my life as a whole, not just my conceptual knowing." (1986, p. 194)

By looking more closely at the life events that were not just critical for the study's participants, but also for me as a learner, I became better able, in Marshall's words again (1986) to find the delicate balance through which, at the final stages of this dissertation, I can, "experience myself nimbly twinning receptivity to others' meanings (communion in Bakan's terms, 1966) with categorizing them through my own interpretations (agency)." (p. 204)

4.2. Social Differences and the experience of disjunction

What emerges most poignantly from many of the working class adults' retrospective accounts is how an awareness of differences was forced upon them from an early age. (Appendix 23). For example, in the previous section, Victoria reported one good teacher. This, however, was insufficient to counteract the disjunction she tended to experience in the school in relation to her own class background. Sadly, this positive experience, providing an oasis for integration and repair, contrasted sharply with her dominant memories of her relationships generally with teachers in the school. She described a particular teacher as, "hateful": a person who said to her, "Victoria, you cannot spell because of your accent. (...) You speak badly; you cannot expect to be able to spell." Victoria recalled her making snide remarks about the newspapers likely to be read by her parents, and those of others in her class, and about how children of mothers who went out to work, could not do well at school: "Oh, she was

hateful. If I saw her now I could kill her (*nervous laughter*) What a bitch she was (*said with great emotion*) (...) There were any number like that. "(V, 6: 99/10, 11).

This kind of experience of being "hatefully" undermined diffused to colour not just Victoria's overall memories of initial education, but also her belief in her own capacities, in that context and for some time to come.

Sheila's story illustrates how transitions can combine with other forces, including peer pressure, to give rise to disjunction, in relation to an acute awareness of one's own differences and positioning in a particular social context. At Junior School, Sheila found learning "fun, , a game" (III, 6: 51/4). She attended this school with members of her community, the school being near to her home. Her sense of integration as a learner was undermined when she moved into secondary school. There, she recalled there being, "more emphasis on me wanting to learn." In this, she conveys the emphasis on individual achievement. This contrasted for her with learning at home which always involved her doing things with her large family. At the secondary school, Sheila was put in a group with children she did not know well, and who were from a more middle class background: "Even now I have some stigma about it." Like Victoria, Sheila experienced deliberate obstacles being placed in her way. For example, she was turned down to be school prefect, "because of where I lived, and that was really hurtful. " Sheila, however, became determined to do better. Nonetheless, this determination raised other tensions with her family and her friends: "Sometimes I felt, whether I should do my school work, my homework or stay with friends who were more comfortable. But then it was quite difficult."

Sheila described a greater sense of integration, when she went on to college, and how this compensated to some extent for her earlier experiences at secondary school. There was still, however, a shadowy side for her, relating to her relationship with the college as a working class woman and the disjunction she experienced between the two learning environments of home and school. She described it as not being so, "layered." In her own words, she conveys a sense of feeling

silenced by not feeling sure of herself, "where I was." This theme that will recur throughout this section: "I wanted to say things, but wasn't able to say things."

Sheila's account will continue to provide a powerful picture of how the consequences of such disjunctions, can remain submerged beneath concerns with the 'official curriculum'. (Salmon, 1988) Her story lends personal meaning and psychological depth to 'issues' such as 'internalising oppression' or 'the hidden curriculum'.

Other accounts from Ethel , Nicole, Susan and Cynthia capture recurring themes across the stories of working class adults.(Appendix 23). Ethel talks about the impact of being taught by middle class teachers who did not allow the children to speak Cockney. She saw them as, "aliens from another planet. They had different accents, different ways. No idea about working class behaviours and attitudes." Nicole talks about her transition from Junior School to a Convent School. Being, "from a typically working class background, I quite understandably felt out of place." Her previous sense of her own capability, reinforced by passing the 11+, felt undermined: "I am not sure why I felt so out of place. It's when I look back that I realise why. " She imagined that everyone was brighter than her, and more confident; she describes becoming a background figure and giving up trying. Home circumstances further underlined her sense of being different, and inferior, since her mother had an "illegitimate baby and this caused other problems."

Susan describes how, having failed the interview for the grammar school as described in the previous section, she had to go to a comprehensive school outside her area, where she was put in the A stream: "I was picked on for my accent, my grammar. (...) I was mocked for my pronunciation. I lived on a council estate. They insinuated that I was promiscuous." She also encountered resistances to her wish to be a tomboy. Another sharp memory for her was sitting an exam with six boys and doing well:

Field record: "But I was demoted and I felt bitter. And my third year teacher said it was personal. So I said, "the hell with you.

I'm not playing the game and I became one of the most disruptive kids in the school."

Cynthia picks up the tensions described by Sheila, speaking about how she too felt, "quite disadvantaged with some of the other girls in the class (...) I felt inadequate with them in all sorts of ways." She had support and pressures from parents and teachers to do well, but if she did well, that, "coloured my relationships with friendships." She suggests that even the discipline of the teachers was being differentially experienced within her class group: "I didn't mind the discipline of teachers but they seemed to get more out of it."

These accounts vividly portray how becoming aware of where one is positioned in the social hierarchy can impinge fundamentally on young peoples' willingness and ability to learn at school. Doing well can in turn set up tensions with family and friends, and perhaps even more so for girls than boys - a theme that will continue to be explored. Perhaps more importantly, the experience of disjunction in terms of these adults' sense of learner identity and possibility in relation to formal education itself, was at the heart of their experience of school.

4.3. Experiencing social differences from a position of strength

Peter, Amy and Raissa provide a different vantage point from which to consider these dimensions of learner experience. (Appendix 24). As middle class and privileged adults, they convey a sense of security about their place in the social hierarchy. Their recollections of their experiences of social differences do not seem to involve fundamental issues about who they were as learners or their sense of possibility.

For example, Peter speaks about making the transition to a local comprehensive from his church based village school. At his previous school, he experienced a clear sense of continuity between home and school. His open striving to do well at school pleased parents and teachers. At the secondary school it was still important to him to compete and do well; however doing so risked social relationships,

and generated a need to develop survival skills. Survival required him to downplay his achievements: "It was much more of an un-nice' thing to be seen to be good, so you had to relate to the teacher privately rather than in public." He spoke about learning these new survival skills the hard way, and until he learned to get on with his peers on their terms, and how to keep his ability hidden, he was, "beaten up regularly for being too clever." He described becoming silenced also, since he realised he had to be self-conscious about what he was learning and his intelligence, in ways that were totally dissimilar from his experience at Junior School.

His story shows clearly how social differences can impinge on individual meanings about what it means to learn and be a learner in particular learning contexts. For Peter, however, this experience seemed to have different personal implications and consequences than it did for a number of the others from working class backgrounds. His fundamental sense of integration was sustained by support and expectations from home, as well as from teachers. For example, he was expected to do homework until he went to bed. His prior experiences at the village school, where he was consistently encouraged and praised for doing well, seems also to have created a reservoir of strength within which his own sense of learner identity and possibility was grounded. As such, he was able to evolve a strategy to manage the disjunction he experienced at the comprehensive effectively, while sustaining an overall sense of integration. This strategy included: keeping his capacities 'under a bush'; relating to teachers privately rather than in the classroom; playing the game with peers; continuing to study hard at home.

Raissa also experienced social differences from a position of strength. She moved from her Welsh grammar school to an English grammar school. She spoke about the enormous cultural differences she encountered, particularly in terms of peoples' class consciousness. But her own sense of integration led her to express her preference for a grammar school rather than a public boarding school, when asked by her parents to choose. She was genuinely shocked by the English, and by her encounters with people telling children they are "no good at that." In Wales, for example, everyone sang, even if they sang out of

tune. She describes circumstances that, for someone less resilient and with fewer compensating forces, might well have given rise to a strong sense of disjunction. For example, at the new Grammar school she recalled feeling frightened, and finding it "oppressive and overpowering. They didn't value the individual except in terms of results. They didn't seem to know who you were unless you achieved. Just lost in the thousands. " Raissa already has a sensitivity to injustice, but from her position as an astute and sensitive social observer, in Africa, Wales and then in England: not as someone who has personally experienced injustice and social inequality in ways that impinged directly on who she was as a person or impeded her sense of possibility. Her strong sense of learner identity is conveyed by her account of her relationship with a history teacher who offered to look up the answer to something for Raissa. Raissa said, "Why should you look it up? I'll look it up and tell you." The teacher said, "That's the beginning of scholarship." Although Raissa speaks about how she did not fully understand that, nonetheless it did not set up any disjunctions for her, in terms of who she was coming to know herself to be as a learner, and what was expected of her by her parents, friends and other teachers.

Raissa has a strong sense of her own value by this stage, and her capacity as a learner, as reinforced by her experiences in the Sudan and at home, with Mr. Brown and in the Welsh grammar school. She also has a clear sense of her own cultural identity, which gives her a certain resilience. Self-managed learning has also been part of her subjective experience for many years by now, and this now evolves as a strategy for coping with the disjunction she felt in this environment. Returning to the metaphor of the sailboat, Rita conveys a strong sense of having her own rudder as a learner here, which enables her to turn potentially disjunctive situations into ones that contribute to her growing sense of integration, and general confidence, as a self-managed learner.

Finally, Amy was threatened by her parents. If she failed the 11+ she would go to the State School. By then, she had learned that this , "was really the pits evidently." She knew that this experience would

set up a fundamental disjunction for her in terms of who she had come to know herself to be as a learner.

I believe these accounts suggest that for many middle class people, their sense of social identity may neither explicitly or persistently feel put 'at risk' during their innitial school years.

5. Learners' responses to their situation

5.1 Pragmatism.

For working class young people, and others who are experienced as 'different' and whose social position within the wider society is at lower levels of the hierarchy, struggles to do with personal and social knowing may be continually placed at the centre of their learning. There were, however, accounts that suggested ways in which some of these adults took it upon themselves to manage the disjunction they were experiencing and demonstrated considerable resilience. (Appendix 25)

Derek, an only son from a working class background, sustained support from his mother, a single parent after his father died. She encouraged and expected him to get to university. 'Finding out' was encouraged at home, although in a less structured way than came across in many of the accounts of those from more middle class homes. Although Derek recalled school overall as a "dead loss", he nonetheless qualified this by saying, "No, it was successful in that it got me here. But I had good and bad experiences at school. (...) [But if] the imagination was grabbed, I was off. " (II, 6: 113/9) Derek speaks about a number of situations in which he took it upon himself to 'find out' more. Self-managed learning, rather than just 'doing homework', was central to his experience of learning at home. This seemed to have been an important strategy for coping with any disjunction he experienced at school.

Fran shows how she managed the disjunction she experienced between learning at school, and learning for life, quite pragmatically, demonstrating a sense of personal agency, that will continue to be a

theme in her learning life history. For example, you went to "evening classes to get an education: cooking, sewing, book-keeping and you got a reward and got a chiffon shirt (...) I didn't read a book until I was 16." Finally, Darcy described how, like Susan, she too became disruptive as a defensive strategy to what she was experiencing. This seemed to be the only way in which she could personally take action to mediate the unequal and unjust treatment she sensed that she was receiving, the confusion she was experiencing across home and school boundaries and the sense of possibility she felt, but would be unable to act upon for a number of years.

5.2.Taking Responsibility.

In many middle class adults' accounts, there is a sense of integration that seems akin to a certain status quo remaining undisturbed. Despite the pressures of managing academic achievement, or survival in different kinds of learning contexts, 'all of a piece' generally suggests a resilience. The middle class students seemed to be more on a life course that was expected of them and supported by home and school. There was a general feeling of 'can do', which was up to them as individuals. This included taking responsibility for 'working hard' and not opting out.

Peter, Raissa, and Amy, whose accounts have been offered previously convey a sense of equilibrium, as they move from home to school into the community and back again. Mediating factors seemed to be in operation at every turn, all the while enabling and encouraging them to take individual responsibility. In each sphere they may have experienced particular challenges, but it was a rare occurrence for them to feel fundamentally undermined in terms of who they were, and what they had to offer and to achieve within the school system.

Moreover, the system itself seemed to ensure that middle class children took personal responsibility for their failures and their successes. Those who came from backgrounds where achievement at school was reinforced by teachers and parents alike suggested that they felt a sense of obligation to live up to these expectations.

Failure itself seemed to have qualitatively different meanings depending upon the social background of the interpreter.

Whereas, for example, Victoria spoke about herself as a failure, she felt angry about the barriers she was up against. In addition, her experiences and those of others, caused them to feel inadequate in comparison with their peers: socially and intellectually. The stories of a number of working class adults suggest that they felt hard pressed to know what actions they might take to change their situation at school.

In contrast, the theme of taking personal responsibility for failure comes across repeatedly in middle class women's accounts. (Appendix 26). On the one hand, there were those whose sense of learner identity and possibility in relation to school seems to have been eroded systematically. On the other hand, there were those whose sense of learner identity seemed to be totally tied up with achievement at school. Not letting the side down, in terms of academic success, seemed to be a critical issue.

For example, Jane spoke about how the labels all the way confirmed "my view of myself as a helpless failure. (...) I was the class fool (...)." She describes how by not working, she could convince herself that she, "might be a success." In other words, it was up to her efforts alone. Similarly, Nina's account in particular captures the 'all of a piece' sense of integration that came across so powerfully in a number of the middle class adults' accounts. What is omitted is as powerful as what is present, when contrasted with the previous accounts. She describes herself as, "attentive and keen. I don't mean jumping up and down and necessarily everything just here (*pointing to her head*) but keen to understand." She conveys the impression that this was her general experience, except when she was in the "loo fiddling with a new hair style." She suggests that she felt a sense of total responsibility for her successes and her failures. Skylarking and opting out when you did not understand obviously meant that you would not do well. In the end, it was up to you. The individual was ultimately responsible. (III,6:012,9).

6. Reflections

For those whose experience of learning at this stage was characterised primarily by disjunction, it will be seen that it can take longer for them to develop and trust in their own resilience, to find their own sources of integration, and to enter into a 'culture of individual responsibility' upon which achievement in formal education seems to depend highly. Rudders in the academic environment will remain largely dependent upon the extent to which compensating mediating influences are available.

The overall message in many working class adults' stories came across to me as one of resignation to what seemed inevitable, with Sheila, Derek and Fran emerging as exceptions. Darcy and Susan, in their decisions to become disruptive, also demonstrate personal agency, but in ways that end up being at their own expense.

As indicated earlier, many reported that by secondary school, they only wanted to get a job and experience life on a different track. 'Marking time' was a common theme. The notion of the self-directed learner, so prevalent in adult learning literature as discussed in Chapter 1, may be put in jeopardy as the result of certain kinds of experiences during the school years. Moreover, these accounts come only from adults who have chosen to return to some kind of formal learning context.

As in Salmon and Claire's study, a recurring theme in accounts of being a learner and learning during the period of initial education is that the, "cognitive and the social in school learning are inextricably intertwined. " (1984). For those whose sense of learner identity, and meanings for learning, have become inextricably tied up with achievement in school, a sense of integration, and satisfaction, as a learner will largely continue to be tied up with experience and achievement in formal education itself. Others such as Peter and Raissa, convey a sense of being self directed, even at this young stage, making their own meanings for learning and being a learner, wherever that can occur. For women who are to marry and work largely

inside their homes for many years, many will be seen to experience a (further) undermining of their sense of possibility as a learner.

For many working class adults, however, the social -in terms of classroom relations, and the ways in which they reflect wider social relations - is recalled as the predominant influence on their capacity and willingness to learn and be a learner in educational environments. Disjunction tended to characterise many of these adults' overall experience of initial education, and so it is in the social context, after leaving school, that compensation will be sought. As Chapter 5 will show, it is outside formal education or in programmes geared to enabling such adults to return to formal education, that a significant number will discover themselves as learners, and new meanings for learning. These 'discovery' experiences will be seen to give rise to an enhanced sense of integration, that will help to repair the damage to self-esteem suffered during the period of initial education. Such experiences will also be seen to be conducive to generating the possibility of returning to formal education, should chance allow.

CHAPTER 5

ADULTS' EXPERIENCES AND MEANINGS OF LEARNING OUTSIDE EDUCATION

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on participants' meanings and experiences of learning and being a learner outside formal education, after they had completed their initial education. As Appendix 3 illustrates, for some, this period began after they had completed some higher or further education, or vocational training. For many with whom in-depth interviews were held, this began after leaving school with few or no qualifications.

Jarvis (1987b, p. 165) in considering the relationship of experience to learning suggests that, "experience itself is only a potential basis of learning. " (emphasis added) This chapter explores the kinds of meanings adults in this study attributed to their experiences outside formal education, and whether and how these related to the meanings for learning and being a learner that had been shaped by prior experience at home and at school.

My original purpose in focusing on learning outside education was to learn if adults had experienced courses characterised by relatively more learner-centred approaches. I was also interested in their self-managed learning. Instead, a host of surprising and ^{un}anticipated dimensions of learner experience emerged, that bore little relation to my starting assumptions and expectations.

Four ways of experiencing what it means to learn and be a learner outside formal education emerged

1. As leading to discovery.
2. As another dimension to lifelong learning.
3. As 'dead end': often entailing loss of confidence and identity.
4. As second best.

These patterns are not always discrete, as will be illustrated. They do, however, provide one way of capturing dominant themes in adults' accounts of learning and being a learner after they completed their initial education.

The notion of adults as 'self-directed lifelong learners' has become normative, pervading much literature on adults' learning. Similarly, accounts of mature students often refer to women who have lost their confidence and sense of identity after working in their homes for many years. There is also a great deal of literature, unfamiliar to me at the beginning of this study, that addresses the intricate interweaving of class and education, and how the middle classes are 'taught' to identify with the system, and with education. On the other hand, the 'discovery theme', is virtually absent in existing literature on adults as learners, particularly since few studies have focused on learning outside and inside the system.

The analysis presented here suggests that alternative experiences of learning and being a learner outside formal education may be more significant than previously realised, particularly in terms of compensating for prior damage at school. Themes of either not learning at all, and gradually losing confidence and self-esteem, or those of discovery, predominated across these adults' stories of learning and being a learner after completing their initial education. These seem most significant in relation to concerns to widen access to 'non-traditional' students.

It seems important to assert that the patterns that are explored in this chapter are offered not as a rigid category system, but rather as a framework for making some sense of the ways in which prior experiences of learning and being a learner - not just at school but also as an adult, outside formal education - might influence how adults perceive formal education, and in turn, whether and how they make the transition to, and subsequently experience, returning to formal education. I shall address this point once again at the end.

2. Learning outside as leading to discovery.

2.1. Introduction

The stories of many working class adults, as described in Chapter 4, suggested how for them, meanings for learning in school could differ from those which figured at home and in their communities. When I turned attention to their experiences of learning and being learners outside formal education, lengthy accounts were forthcoming. In other words, my meaning seemed to be implicitly understood. This was distinctly not the case with some adults, as I shall discuss subsequently.

Memories of discovering (re-discovering?) one's own potential and confidence as a learner - and where, how and with whom such discoveries occurred - were often vividly recounted. For some, such discoveries occurred as a result of pain and struggle. For others, Discovery of who one is in relation to the world has come about through fortuitous circumstances. But the overall image in these discovery accounts is that of people urged on, trying to repair confidence in themselves as a learner - with ebbs and flows of success. In such struggles, developmental shifts in how learning in relation to education is construed become apparent.

Many describe ways in which they continue to learn with others, in the course of living, working and being a family member. They convey the underlying assumption that learning outside formal education is a meaningful and legitimate 'proving ground' where compensation, learning and the exploration of possibilities can take place. This assumption is reflected in the significance and level of meaning attached to accounts of nonformal and informal learning.

Retrospectively, through the interviews, recurring cycles of disjunction and integration as part of the pattern of discovery are suggested. The momentum generated towards greater integration as a learner seems to have created the possibility for a return to formal education to occur.

The influence of discovery experience will be seen to underpin the interpretative frameworks whereby these adults anticipate and experience a return to formal education. Each of these suggests a different dimension to the complexity of disjunction-integration cycles. They also illuminate a predominant theme in the working class adults' accounts about how alternative learning, outside the system, can actively compensate for previous disjunction experienced within the educational system.

2.1 Discovery out of pain and struggle.

In some 'discovery' accounts, major life transitions and changes figure strongly, such as redundancy, or bereavement and personal struggles of identity in relation to society. In these accounts, relationships of quality, and dialogue with significant others, are often reported as critical. These can enable the learner to come through such experiences with increased confidence, affirmation and a sense of integration and possibility as a learner. (Appendix 27)

2.1.1. Patricia

Patricia's account draws on three sources: an individual and a group interview and written material that she wrote for a course upon her return to higher education. Her story, like the others that follow, links several experiences of learning outside the formal system.

It was her experience as an immigrant that, although immensely painful, proved a major source of discovery and eventual integration for Patricia. She found her taken for granted assumptions challenged, she learnt Hebrew and "a whole new way of relating to people opened up."

She lived on a Kibbutz and at first she had a number of jobs, mainly secretarial. She was to stay five years and she described the entire period as a time of immense learning about learning and about herself as a learner. The key turning point came through her involvement in Re-evaluation counselling, inspired by her encounter with the person who had evolved the theory:

Field record: "This person was so positive about me - more so than any other teacher. He saw me as someone with potential. He had a high expectation of me and this was an amazing experience. He believed in me, not my distress at the time. He went off to the U.S. and I was in Israel but knowing that someone thought about me in that way made such a difference. It was a very difficult time for me." (I, 7: 61/3)

The impact of a particular person's belief in the learner is once again illustrated, since this was central to Patricia becoming able to develop a sense of her own possibility as a learner. Her account also picks up a thread from the previous chapter about her locus of confidence being lodged in the reactions of other people.

She also acknowledged other influences on her at this time: "My flatmate, the counselling. I also remember a time when I was in front of the group and I cried. And I couldn't believe it. I wasn't rejected. (...)" Patricia described this as a, "complete validation of me (...)" As a whole person, I felt o.k."

After eighteen months, Patricia was encouraged by the originator of the movement, her "positive teacher", and by others to train as an assistant teacher, which took a further year. She discovered this work was something she could, "greatly enjoy and am competent at." (I, 7: 45/15)

When I probed as to what inhibited Patricia as a learner, she replied immediately, "a chronic lack of self-confidence. Most people don't know that because I keep it well hidden. You're not allowed to express that sort of thing." She also spoke about how becoming an immigrant, moving from West to East, opened her up to many different ways of knowing and seeing which were personally painful and challenging. When I asked her if she sees herself as a learner, she explained that she, "never used to. That's why it took me so long to get to college. But someone's belief in me got me here." She vividly captures the complexity embedded in the notion 'learner identity', and how it is rooted in these stories, with the following: "I get the feeling that I'm not a learner. But when I verbalise what I know, I realise I am a

learner. Strange isn't it?" In this, Patricia captures the sense of disjunction, borne out of contrasting experiences of learning and being a learner, that still impeded her own sense of possibility as a learner, and her capacity to consider formal education as a valid means for exploring that.

She illustrates this 'learner identity dilemma' in the following account:

Field record: "To give you an example, recently, I went to a talk about Israel and the Middle East. He said something I didn't like and I decided to say something. I figured I can only get smashed. I realised how much information I had and I terrified myself into silence. WHAT WAS THE IMPACT? I was asked to do a public talk. I didn't do it, but I decided to take on the questions on my own. But I realised my own feelings of fear and my own lack of confidence."(I, 7: 9/7)

Patricia's use of the phrase, "terrified myself into silence" will be seen to be quite critical in women's accounts. Recent research (Belenky et al, 1986) suggests that for many women, feeling 'outside' and not one of the 'authorities' (who are seen to be male) may make each tentative step towards self-expression one that is laden with a sense of intrusion. The word 'smashed' and other similar words like 'squashed, squished' recur repeatedly in women's accounts.

Patricia spoke about how important it was to her to have, "someone to whom I could talk about how I felt". She concluded that some of the feelings she had, were not, " simply that I felt bad, but rather that something around me, the way people relate to one another was actually what caused the feelings in the first place." She decided that although it was important to deal with feelings, it was equally important to think, "about the community around me, and where possible, assisting to make the actual change within the community." (I, 7:55/14)

Patricia's account picks up an earlier theme from Chapter 4 related to the power of particular teachers, when the locus of confidence is

dependent upon external influences. Here again, the impact of a relationship becomes critical to the person's sense of confidence, and willingness and capacity to learn in particular situations. This relationship, as well as an acceptance of her distress at this time by others as part of her 'whole being' and continual dialogue with others enabled her to survive, as well as to engage and re-engage actively in cycles of disjunction and integration.

Another theme evident in this account is that of the relatedness, of individual and the social context. She had previously come to know aspects of herself as 'bad', based on her experience in England and in school. Being forced to survive in another culture forced her also to re-examine taken for granted aspects of her experience and her previous learning, in the widest sense. She brings this understanding of learning, and herself as a person and a learner to Higher Education. Such hard won learning is difficult to set aside at the door of the institution, and will inevitably shape expectations and interpretations of subsequent experience. I have subsequently encountered Patricia by chance, and having completed her course, she has achieved her goal of becoming a self-employed trainer/consultant. She works in the area of equal opportunities and organisational change, and also specialises in work with women, particularly with regard to assertiveness training. She remains involved in re-evaluation counselling.

2.2.4 Godfrey, Bill and Janice

A different meaning for discovery, born out of personal struggle and a search for meaning and identity in relation to the wider social context is offered by these three Black people. I interviewed Godfrey and Janice first on their own - briefly, due to time constraints - and later in a group, which Bill joined. It was difficult to explore in depth personal meanings for learning outside formal education in a trio; they were also preoccupied with their current experiences as students on degree courses. They, did however, allude to their own discovery efforts in slightly different terms: not so much as something that happened to them, but something that they were determined to gain, in order to make sense of their own experiences

as Black people. This dimension of difference seems important to include, despite there being comparatively less material than others in this section.

When I asked them who had helped them to learn, outside the formal education system, Bill said, "No one who has inspired me. Done it on my own. Friends, school system, pushed us aside." Godfrey continued,

Field record: "No one for me either. Always felt I needed to get out, get out. Recently wrote a poem and one of the things I was saying: "Must understand. Must set free. Must understand. Must set free. Not my thoughts. White man talks. He has answer." (...) Darker the skin, harder [it is]. Always had that in me. A driving force. Will not stay at the bottom. People along the way whom I've chatted with. But not them, but the issues which have affected me. One thing which has encouraged me to learn is the existence of White people." (I, 7:109/25)

In these few words, they seem to capture the essence of the disjunction that drive⁶ their determination to compensate for previous experiences: the disjunction they feel between their sense of possibility and learner identity and between the messages they have consistently received from society. Godfrey and Bill will continue to experience a sense of isolation and disjunction once they return to higher education. Janice also speaks about wanting to learn, " in reaction to the views we get. Will show them, or will show myself!" (I, 7:109/25)

Janice similarly spoke about how, after leaving school, she learned more about her self as a woman: that women understood her "as a person", that she didn't want to be a housewife and that she was an ambitious person." All these things were important discoveries for her, since they helped to counteract assumptions about who she might be in relation to the world gained from learning during the initial school years. When I asked her to contrast learning outside school with that which she experienced within it, she spoke about how learning since leaving school has been "much wider. Plus learning things which have a wider impact on you as a person."

When higher education emerges as an option, these interpretative frameworks will be seen to shape how they make sense of their expectations and experiences of re-entry. Moreover, their determination to make sense of their experiences as Black people once again in formal education will cause them to engage in active discovery with others, in order to compensate for their experiences on their degree courses.

2.2.3. Susan

Finally, Susan illustrates how the disjunction she had experienced throughout her life, at home and at school, with respect to being a learner and learning, was compensated by a series of experiences that few might associate with integration: that of being admitted to a psychiatric hospital and living in Brunei. Susan's experiences of initial education were fraught with struggle and barometric rises and falls of energy and expression of her considerable capabilities. As discussed previously in Chapter 4, from an early age she spoke of her awareness that she would need to educate herself. These two experiences significantly compensated for the views of herself as a learner that she had internalised both from her family and the educational system.

Susan spoke about how she had always, "read a great deal" and how she, "had a strong sense of learning outside school. (...) I learned you had to educate yourself. And you had to fight hard to preserve that." A sense of isolation pervaded these activities, however: "You have no people to discuss things with. This felt quite odd. It was just all me reading, and thinking, and writing occasionally."

Susan's parents found this all quite difficult. As Susan put it, "strange in that kind of background. (laughter) Supposed to be. But it was a problem." She spoke about how her father thought she was being "pretentious". Moreover, she described how she changed jobs, the minute she became bored: "I had nobody to talk to. So at 21, I cut my wrists. My mother said, "This is what reading all those books does to you." Susan went into psychiatric hospital at age 21, and there, experienced a sense of integration as a learner:

Field record: "For the first time I found people I could talk to. Within 2 to 3 weeks I was reading Bertrand Russell. I could talk to my psychiatrist. Three of us [on the ward] started talking. (...) Other people had come to think we were all nutters. No one talked outside the hospital."

The craving for stimulation and dialogue - a theme in many stories - is perhaps most poignant in Susan's case. She married soon after leaving hospital, and her husband's work opened up the opportunity of travel. Brunei, paradoxically identified as the place where women are isolated and repressed, opened up yet another opportunity for integration as a learner:

Field record: "Mostly middle-class women who had done degrees sitting around doing nothing. It was great! (She laughed) We talked like mad and I discovered literature. Proust. We just talked like mad." Susan describes how, although at first she felt disadvantaged since many of the women had degrees, she realised that this lack of confidence came from her not them: "When they listened, they were rapt. There really was respect."

These discovery experiences, affording opportunities for dialogue with others, further reinforced Susan's conviction that the best education was one you gave yourself: "Again, I realised that the pieces of paper were a load of crap. I believed that then and I still do now."

For the first time Susan felt affirmed in who she was, and who she might be as a learner. Coming back to England was "horrendous" for her because, "Now I knew I wasn't mad." Once again she went into a period of depression, as a result of which she encountered a psychologist who diagnosed her problem as one of thinking, "I was a man." She describes trying to fight this depression, but in the middle of it all, "My husband was killed in a crash."

It was this bereavement that led Susan to Hillcroft. But not until she encountered information about Hillcroft by chance did she allow

her own sense of learner identity to embrace the possibility of a return to formal education. (Appendix 27).

2.2. Discovery out of fortuitous circumstances.

Many of the themes associated with moving through cycles of disjunction and integration in ways that involve discovery of oneself as a learner are reflected in the accounts below. Where these accounts differ from the previous ones is that discovery arises out of fortuitous circumstances, rather than major personal upheavals, transitions and struggles. These adults describe a kind of spiralling forward, each loop generating a sense of enhanced integration, and helping to repair previous damage. Affirmation, the role of dialogue and relationships, and the re-questioning of earlier experience are themes that once again recur with consistent regularity. This set of discovery stories exemplifies processes that, across the accounts of working class men and women, seemed to compensate for earlier educational experience and build the ground for subsequent returns to higher education. These accounts tend to illustrate the wide variety of learning contexts in which discovery and affirmation of their own possibilities occurred for these working class adults. Their discoveries come through political activity, women's groups, work and training. They continue to illustrate the pattern suggested by previous accounts. For those whose previous experiences had undermined any sense of learner identity and possibility in relation to formal education, discovery enables new meanings of learning to evolve. These seem to be associated not with particular contexts, but rather with particular processes and feelings. Four accounts illustrate how such experiences can help adults spiral towards enhanced integration. (Appendix 28).

2.3.1. Victoria

Victoria's story of learning inside formal education in Chapter 4 may be recalled as one characterised by continual disjunction. She spoke of fear, class-related difficulties with teachers and leaving school feeling like a 'total failure'. She left at 16, with two O's, thanks to the one teacher in particular who made her feel capable. Victoria took a job, but saw this as merely a practical and necessary move,

rather than an opportunity for learning and development. I asked her when, looking back, did 'learning' happen for her. The image of someone withdrawing from the world to repair earlier damage is very powerful:

Field record: "Not in the teenage years. Not until I got married (...) That was just my little world and I didn't want to escape from it. (...) No one can interfere with me here and tell me what to do. This is my bit."

Victoria speaks about how, after she had her first child, she had, time on her own: "that's when I suddenly realised (...) I couldn't hide in my shell any longer and I couldn't just live through her and I just thought, 'Idiot!'" She spoke about how nonetheless she "went into" parenting, and gardening and cooking. When I asked her about opportunities for discussion with other people she said, "No, I withdrew completely. Couldn't relate to anybody. To my family, anybody." In this, Victoria foreshadows the theme that was in a number of women's stories who worked entirely inside their homes. She conveys her sense of 'identity-lessness' at this time in her life, through her pejorative self-reference, 'idiot'. (Women who feel similarly to Victoria, but whose routes did not involve discovery, speak in section 4.)

Victoria continued unprompted to relate when 'it' happened - 'it' referring to the beginnings of her discovery of herself as a learner. The rhythms and self-propelled momentum of her account contrasted sharply ^{with} other accounts of learning outside the formal educational system. Some had difficulty associating meanings for learning with alternative forms and processes; for this group, learning only meant what they were enabled to experience as a result of fortuitous circumstances having left school. 'It' - the beginning of this spiral towards enhanced integration - is absolutely clear to her. I only asked her to talk about what it meant to learn and be a learner outside formal education.

'It' did not happen during the teenage years. As she says, "I'll tell you what started it off." She explains how, after she had her first

child, her husband was working in a car factory by day and doing A levels by night. And then the miners' strike of the 1970's began, and "I thought, hey mate, there's more to life than this, and I woke up. Yeah I really did. (*said with real excitement.*). Victoria began to go to marches, became involved in Trade Union activity, and became alert to current events. Her sense of discovery, of this new learner identity, was enhanced by her husband's decision to do a degree as a mature student at a University: "He was completely bewildered by it all." Victoria explained how he had been encouraged by a teacher to do this, "and we were two lost souls. Had never even met a university student, much less been one." Once again, Victoria captures this theme that comes across in a significant number of working class adults' accounts: that higher education was totally alien to how they saw themselves and their own possibilities. Victoria explains that, "That was a big change in my life, to actually experience this." But paralleling this "big change" was also her experience of "producing babies and that's where I got my awe of 18 year olds!"

Victoria actually did her husband's course vicariously, reading and discussing much of what he was reading with him, and feeling the, "excitement, stimulation. A whole new world to me." I asked her if it ever occurred to her to compare this learning with learning at school: "No, I just thought it was better. I forgot school. It was a bad experience. I didn't like it."

Victoria, in her account of her discovery through the Miners' Strike and her vicarious studentship echoes themes in Mezirow's (1978) account of perspective transformation amongst women who return to higher education. The difference for Victoria is that, without these experiences, it is unlikely that she would ever have returned. For the first time, she discovered what it was like to,

Field record: "... be in charge of my life. Yeah, yeah, having some say in my own life. It actually woke me up. (...) It was, I think, actually being involved. (...) I really started to wake up and I think I'd been asleep for about 20 years."

At the same time as Victoria was experiencing this enhanced sense of integration through these learning experiences and an entirely new identity as a learner, she nonetheless felt a strong sense of disjunction with her friends: "And I hadn't got any friends I could discuss this with." She began to seek out, "things where I could meet people who talked like I did and thought like I did or thought I thought!" (V, 7:104/19) In other words, Victoria needed to be with others who affirmed this new sense of learner identity and accepted her as a thinking and socially alert individual.

Her story about learning at this time in her life contrasts starkly with her description of learning at school, which was, "that place where I did these lessons and that was it and it didn't relate much to the real world, to me, not to my real world at any rate." Victoria captures the strong sense of disjunction she felt between 'her world' and school, and the extent to which it undermined her capacity and willingness to learn in that situation.

Her experiences of the Miners' Strike and her husband's course led Victoria to seek out further opportunities for stimulation and dialogue. It would seem that in political activity she felt a sense of integration that compensated particularly for the disjunction she had experienced in most educational settings in relation to her social class. She continued to attend Labour party meetings and Workers Educational Association courses. But these experiences of learning gave rise to yet another area of disjunction as a learner, related to gender.

At one point, in her account of why she had chosen Hillcroft, Victoria referred to how domineering she had found men in discussion groups associated with political activity. In reaction, Victoria described how she would, "go passive. And I would be emotional. I would be angry and then get accused of being irrational and a stupid woman." But she also suggests that by this point, she felt far more confident in herself, and sought compensation in a women's group associated with the Peace Movement. In contrast, there, "we all gave each other time to talk." She accounts for how even though they had, "some hairy arguments (...)at least you didn't feel threatened in any way." For

Victoria, not feeling threatened was rooted in the fact that, "we were all women. We all had the same feelings. A mutual feeling that we all had similar problems and similar feelings." She talks about the importance of sharing things, "that you felt, that other people felt and 'Gosh, I'm not mad. I'm not stupid. I am not alone.' Victoria acknowledges how difficult it is for women to overcome these feelings: "[this] can be very frightening and I've still got friends who can't raise themselves out of their [unclear] and what they really feel because it is so frightening." In this, Victoria shows how she too can empathise with women who feel without identity - a theme to be discussed subsequently in this chapter. She realised how lucky she was to have experienced something that was "very exciting and stimulating." When I asked her how this experience of learning compared with her experience of learning in the Trade Union and the Labour Party, she said reflectively, "No, it felt quite different. Yes, different."

Again, the theme arises of 'I'm not mad, I'm not stupid'. She also conveys the struggle that can be entailed in maintaining a sense of confidence in one's own possibilities. Victoria also picks up a theme suggested explicitly by Patricia and which threads its way through these various accounts: that of her inherent connectedness to her social environment.

In these excerpts, Victoria illustrates how, unlike Susan, she experienced discovery of herself as a learner without a major personal upheaval. But her account further illustrates the cyclical nature of disjunction and integration, a theme running through so many of these adults' experiences of learning and being a learner in different contexts over time. Integration in one area of one's experience as a learner may give rise to disjunction in another. The same cyclical pattern was evident in the stories of Patricia and Susan cited in the previous section. Cycles of disjunction and integration, dragging in their wake experiences of feeling 'with and without rudder', seem to be a theme in accounts of any significant learning, regardless of the learning context. (A second illustration of discovery initially through a woman's group is offered by Diane, Appendix 28)

2.3. 2. Darcy

Darcy's story further illustrates the discovery theme, and the ways in which working class adults in this study came to associate learning with particular processes and feelings. Her account exemplifies once again the theme of discovery being associated with a particular person or relationship. In Darcy's case, she was fortunate enough to find two 'mentors' at work, who sensed and encouraged her potential.

Darcy left grammar school at 16 with 3 'O' levels. She was the woman who, in Chapter 4, I reported as using bad behaviour as a 'cry for help', and who talked about being boosted by the Head, but in ways that were too little, too late. She also expressed her sadness that no one persuaded her to stay on at school:

In describing what happened after she left school, Darcy talks about working at a chemist's and then, as a secretary while going to the technical college, "where I played truant. I felt strange. I felt this isn't right for me. I don't belong here. I'm different." She speaks about bluffing her way into another secretarial job which had more potential, but she then became pregnant, at age 17. She left her husband at 20, and did some evening classes to refresh her secretarial skills. She describes her learning at this time as, "very utilitarian. I certainly was not enamoured with doing it.(...) But I was not a 'whole self' yet. I hadn't discovered alternative meanings of learning." As with Victoria, Darcy has a clear recollection of when her turning point, in the evolution of her own learner identity and sense of possibility, came. She played the 'sexual games' that seemed necessary to her to progress as a secretary, and eventually became a sales office manager: "I was an excellent secretary but I often had this 'bursting' feeling inside me."

Once Darcy became Sales Manager, she was befriended by a colleague, who gave her books to read: "I remember discovering George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia. I went crazy. I wanted more!" Although this mentoring relationship had sexual overtones, she nonetheless benefitted from this immensely in terms of beginning to develop an identity as a learner. She did not discuss what she read: "I was too

busy consuming. I just wanted to be a sponge!" Simultaneously, she was going through personal difficulties, struggling with being a single parent. She started looking for a stable relationship, and decided to marry her mother's hairdresser. This decision led to another one: to shelve her own 'learning journey:

Field record: "So although the books were there for me, I put them aside and shelved them and then shifted. They were tucked away and they were still there. But I became who he wanted me to be."

Darcy's story vividly illustrates many of the themes in women's 'discovery stories': for example, the drive for 'something else'; 'shelving themselves' lest they threaten their husbands; feeling 'in relatedness' to others- in this case to her son. An integrated sense of her identity as a mother and her determination to provide her son with a father enabled her to 'shelve' symbolically the disjunction arising from giving up her books to become what her husband wanted. In Chapter 6, Darcy is to once again experience fortuitous circumstances that enable her to continue her spiral towards enhanced integration, and her discovery of her own learner identity: Ultimately, however, she will go on to higher education where the preciousness of what her discovery meant to her will be put at risk, and not without consequences.

It is interesting to compare the stories of Darcy and Diane in relation to Victoria's with respect to where they ultimately sought further expression for their needs as learners. Victoria went on to a women's college, where opportunities to make connections between her experience and what was being learnt, as well as across subjects, were plentiful, as were opportunities for dialogue and affirmation. Darcy and Diane enter a male-dominated science department, where they experience fundamentally different views of learning and knowledge, and learning processes that were not conducive to their maintaining a continued sense of sharing and discovery. Victoria continued to experience a sense of integration; the other a profound disjunction throughout her course. Diane, however, was able to draw on the reservoir of experience afforded by her alternative learning outside formal education, and thus, was able to manage effectively. Darcy,

identified as one of the top students and the brightest in her group, was not willing to settle for what was being offered to her, and chose to leave in her second year. Their stories will be further explored in Chapter 7.

2.3.3. Laurence

Laurence's account of his discovery of himself as a learner, arose out of his being made redundant in his early 50's, and being without role or purpose for the first time in his life. This had tremendous power and significance in terms of the ways he regarded himself as a learner, and his previous (and subsequent) experiences of learning.

Laurence had described his early education as 'patchy' and like so many others, during and upon leaving initial education, saw learning from life as quite separate, more meaningful and a higher priority. Laurence was unable to read when he left school. He spoke about being in the navy, becoming a local councillor, and having been a mechanic for most of his life. About 6 years before his return to higher education, he was made redundant. He suffered a nervous breakdown soon after that, four months after trying an O level. He recalls, "I think it was only marginally to do with my studying." He nonetheless decided to tackle, "education wise my basic problem which I later learned was dyslexia. So I went to an Adult Education Centre for illiterates." They suggested he not come back, his inference being that he was too ambitious as compared with others at the centre: "I said I wanted to do an O level in English and Politics." He also used to walk out of classes, since he was still suffering from depression.

Soon after this Laurence became engaged in what I call the 'Marshall Keate' story: this represented the turning point for him in terms of his development of a sense of identity and possibility as a learner. (See also, Weil, 1986). He explained that he had long been interested in history, and eventually became intrigued as to the origins of the name of a pub above which he was living: The Marshall Keate. His curiosity led him on a learning journey through which he overcame not only his dyslexia, but led him into libraries, using reference materials and wide ranging reading:

Field record: "I used everything: local peoples' knowledge, general conversations in the pub (seminars really!) and television - anything that was on that I thought might give us a clue. And newspapers." (Appendix 5B4b)

Since Laurence was speaking retrospectively, and this was the first opportunity he had had to reflect on this experience since becoming a mature student, he became intrigued about how this experience of learning related to what he was experiencing at the time of the interview. He became quite excited about the paradox that emerged for him out of his Marshall Keate experience:

Field record: "It takes me back to what is knowledge and education? (...) I gained a great deal from reading. I thought I was ignorant but I gained knowledge. If I had known how to search for it, I would never have got into local history. That's something to think about, isn't it?! Quite profound that. (*He became quite excited*) If I knew then, what I know now, I would not know now what I learned then. I must remain aware of this, that knowledge is restricted in all sorts of ways. If you compare it to the child - who roams all over the place. The more we pour into that child, the more we might be restricting his intellect and their natural ability to learn. Like in secondary school, I never learned a thing. And my early education was patchy."

Laurence's redundancy had left him without role or purpose for the first time in his life. His Marshall Keate learning journey provided a new sense of identity and possibility which was to lead him to doing a degree course at a polytechnic. But never once did Laurence refer to family or friends, nor to the need for affirmation from others, in the ways that are so striking across the women's accounts. He conveys a sense of isolation, of, 'going it alone'. For example, I asked him if during his Marshall Keate adventure he sought others out: "All the time. I would be sitting in the Marshall Keate pub and points would come to which no one would have an answer. So I would go and look them up." (I, 7:109/8) His own sense of validation seemed to come not through feeling in-relation-to others, but from his autonomous accomplishments in response to their questions. There seemed a

qualitatively different feel about his account, as well as that of Derek's, Frank's and Godfrey's: a theme which I shall continue to develop through Part II.

2.4. The discovery of a sense of learner identity and possibility: some reflections

I believe that Laurence captures a paradox across the interview material itself. It was interesting to me that no middle class adults actually spoke about their experiences and meanings for learning in the same terms as those for whom learning outside led to discovery for the first time. This sense of discovery for these adults seemed to be rooted in how these experiences sharply contrasted with the meanings for learning and the lack of learner identity as developed during the initial school years.

Education, and particularly higher education, was not 'for them'. Academic achievement was for the 'special few'. They saw themselves as outside of that. But in these accounts, they find themselves involved in experiences of learning characterised by excitement and stimulation, but in ways that are qualitatively different from anything they experienced at school, and therefore have both significance and meaning.

These kinds of meanings and interpretations for learning forced me to abandon the more structured conceptions of learning outside the system with which I began the study and to embrace a more diffuse meaning for learning, that had power in terms of these adults' lives.

Voice 2: Paradoxically, my own experience of moving outside formal education had given me an experiential basis for making sense of what these adults were talking about. But it was some time before I could see these patterns clearly. In a field note to myself made in February, 1985, reflecting my attempts to make sense of these alternative conceptions of learning, I wrote the following, in reference to Laurence speaking about his learning to use the library as something 'quite academic', and totally outside his realm of experience or sense of possibility:

Field record: "I wonder if that is a recurring theme amongst those who felt alienated from formal education. Anything smacking of the academic seeming distant, requiring special skills, etc?"

What I realise now is that these adults were saying something fundamental about how they saw themselves as learners: what I have come to refer to as their sense of learner identity and possibility. They opened me up to a way of thinking about learning and about how we curtail or enhance opportunities for learning for learners, in ways that were outside the boundaries of my own conceptual frameworks and learner identity. But paradoxically, what they were describing was not outside the boundaries of my own experience. It was as if my 'head' was denying the power and validity of my own experience. Several years into the study I was speaking with a mature student who had returned to higher education 15 years after leaving school with a number of qualifications. She had been an able student, who had always enjoyed school. She said to me, "What I realised, when I went back, and was struggling with their meanings for learning and knowledge, was that my entire relationship to formal education had fundamentally changed. I was a different person." I could no longer accept academic meanings as automatically read. This has caused me great difficulties.

This insight into her own experience, set in motion a re-structuring of my own perceptions and meanings, that had been quietly but persistently bombarded by the stories of adults such as these for several years. I began to make sense of why I had experienced such a culture shock when I returned to study. I too had changed my relationship to formal education. My learner identity had previously been rooted in formal education meanings for learning and formal validation. Anything else was second best. My coming to England had been 'interesting' but any learning which had resulted from what I referred to as my 'detour' was 'not really learning' because it had not been validated by higher education. But the return confronted me with just how valid this other learning was. And why was it treated with such disregard? My own sense of disjunction arose from feeling that I had to set huge dimensions of myself and my experience at the door of the academy. I had not appreciated this when I began the study, but this experience was embedded in my tacit knowing. I therefore could gradually hear the discovery theme, and tease out the meaning in what others were saying. And as such, I began to discover new meanings in my own experience as a learner.

Another paradox emerges, however. The 'discovery theme' was a real surprise to me in the Cityside accounts, and seeing this as the dominant theme, I systematically pursued in subsequent cycles. It was only later, when I came back to the data with re-vision, that I realised that across the whole of the data were themes that were equally as strong in the data: themes to do with women's lives, and putting others first. A critical examination of my resistance to 'hearing' the strength of this led to a critical examination of this theme in my own life. Why, for example, had I so readily given up the opportunity to do a PhD at a top university in the U.S. , leaving in addition my country, career, and reputation behind, to deal with a family crisis in England? Why I had not seen myself as having a choice? These were questions which the themes in this research forced me to grapple. Meanwhile, the theme which most

dominated in the literature - that of adults as lifelong learners - was echoed only in a few adults' stories...

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the 'discovery theme' emerged most strongly from the accounts at Cityside, and it was this axis of meaning that I systematically pursued in subsequent cycles when I focused on the time between completing initial education and returning to a formal learning context. The next three patterns suggested by alternative accounts, resonate more easily with themes in the existing literature.

3. Learning outside as another dimension to lifelong learning.

One set of accounts suggests that these adults have been 'lifelong learners' for most of their lives. This group tends to regard all sorts of learning experiences whether inside or outside education as meaningful and significant, because of how they approach them, make use of them and build on them: at work, on courses, and through struggles arising from just living. Some interesting commonalities and differences are captured in this particular set of stories, as compared to those whose 'discovery stories' are illustrated above. I would include amongst this group, drawing from those with whom depth interviews were conducted: Peter, Raissa, and Derek. (Appendix 29)

These lifelong learners, convey the sense that meanings for learning and being a learner resonate to some extent with school-based experiences, but go well beyond these. These learners on the whole felt no disjunction between home and school, and seem to have evolved a sense of learner identity rooted in themselves and the totality of their experiences.

The seeds of this 'lifelong learning identity' came across not just in their accounts of learning outside formal education, but also as something that began at school. For example, Peter spoke about how in the sixth form at his private school, students "started to be treated more like adults" at which point he realised he was different from many of his classmates. He describes how for the first time he became

detached from what was "going on outside because we were being treated roughly as adults by the teachers and encouraged to do this for our own sake and for our careers, which was a new emphasis." He spoke about how^{he} began to see studying as,

Field record/: "... something on its own, as away from the rest of what others were doing, so there was this change (...) and perhaps I wouldn't have called it learning then but I did see it as important".

He also talks about becoming more of an individual, and valuing the ways in which he was different from others, and how, in turn, he could offer the young ones something different. He also began to recognise aspects of the school's hidden agenda to do with "violence and the pressure to conform and I realised before I left that the education we were getting was nothing to do with what we were learning in the classroom."

Peter left school to work in a bank, still living at home: "so I used to spend most of my time sitting in the library reading psychology. Freud and the obvious things (...)and I also started reading vaguely philosophical books" (IV, 6:087/3). Peter later moved to London. He describes how he began to learn how to structure his reading (IV, 7:064/33) and take recommendations from others, in relation to questions arising from not just his other reading, but also his experience. (IV, 7:065/36) For example, he speaks about how an ex-school mate came back into his life at a time when he was , "thinking about morals, religion and things that were still important to me" and how he tried hard to make sense of this man's new stance through reading and provocative questioning. He concluded that his Christian involvements stemmed more from his shyness, rather than a religious conviction. (IV, 7:062/34)

When the so called 'lifelong learners' responded to my questions about learning and being a learner outside formal education, they conveyed the sense of being at the centre of a 'stream of learning' that largely they directed. There was a qualitatively different 'feel' in other kinds of accounts. With the discovery learners, the 'stream' of

discovery did not embrace formal education easily as an option, if at all. In contrast, the stories of these learners conveyed a variety of ways in which they could embrace all sorts of spheres and meanings for learning, depending upon their circumstances, needs and interests. Their stories continually conveyed ways in which they were their own 'sense-makers', in terms of how they gave meaning to school based learning and learning derived from living and being with others. In this, they also contrasted with the first group who tended to feel a sense of disjunction between these different kinds of learning. A sense of integration, in their meanings, and in themselves as learners, was thus conveyed.

For example, when Derek spoke about himself as a learner, he thought not of school, but first of his parents, "and that was an ongoing thing and still is, my mother particularly." Such learning for him meant, "not sitting down learning but more being given experiences and having experiences related to me that formed me, but an ongoing thing (...) Constantly surrounded by it." Derek spoke about having had a sense of becoming a more mature learner at a particular stage. When I probed on this, he explained that for him this meant,

Field record: "... independent learning the desire to go out and find out more about something. Perhaps something I had been slightly enthusiastic about in a classroom or somewhere, but then I made a conscious effort, a physical effort. To find out more. I remember doing that. "

As discussed previously, for Raissa, there were no "hard and fast lines" between learning at home and learning at school for the first ten years of her life in the Sudan, where her mother ran the mission school.

Field record: "There were no hard and fast lines between what age you were when you did things, you could move from one group to the other. By the time I was nine, I had read all of Dickens. I was very well read. Looking back on it, I think I had read more English by 10 or 11 than I ever read ever again because it was expected of us." (II, 6: Int 1, p. 5)

Raissa carried this sense that most her education, "happened under 11 and it wasn't necessarily to do with school. " In the previous chapter, some aspects of Raissa's experiences at school in Wales and then in England were described. What is interesting to this discussion is how she felt that she, "never made an effort about learning. I never felt I had to study. If I wanted to read it, then I read it." She took responsibility for her own learning at secondary school in various ways. For example, she began Latin as a Welsh speaker, and found that the same rules did not apply. The class had been learning Latin for two years. The teacher called her hopeless. Raissa learned later that this was required for entry to Oxbridge, so in the upper sixth, she sought out a retired Classics scholar, and with only six months until her A level, went every Saturday and got 90% on her exam. She attributed this to this teacher's love of the subject, and her openness to Raissa's distinctive way of approaching it.

Raissa's description of what it meant to learn and be a learner upon leaving school continued to convey the sense that her learner identity was strongly lodged within her, and that all sorts of opportunities presented themselves which, negative or positive, provided a basis for learning and development. Professional development opportunities, including joining a group run by a psychiatrist, where she found the learning extremely painful but exciting

Her 'lifelong learning' orientation is perhaps best captured in a statement she made in her account of her first return to education, following a gap since her first degree. She asserted that when she began, she was determined that, "learning on that course was not going to mean "putting [things] into categories, assimilating it. But as a result of going into that group, I thought, 'No! Everything is going to go through me.'"

Raissa was very centred in her identity as a learner and like the others clearly embraced formal education in projections of her own sense of possibility. She nonetheless, valued highly the opportunities for dialogue and exchange with others. For her, this was at the heart of her meanings for learning: learning with and from other people,

who also had experience to share.

In summary, this group differs from the previous one in various respects. First, their school-home experiences of learning as described in Chapter 4 and above came across as having been characterised by a sense of integration. Any difficulties encountered at school seemed more than compensated for by other kinds of learning experiences, as suggested previously in Chapter 4. Secondly, a strong sense of learner identity and possibility was consistently communicated, from an early age, and this seemed clearly lodged within these individuals, rather than dependent upon the affirmation of others. Others, however, could enhance it. In this, these adults conformed to the normative assumption in much adult learning literature about adults being 'highly self directed.' (e.g. Tough, 1979; Knowles, 1978): now, the subject of much criticism (e.g. Tennant, 1988) Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this group freely moved in and out of education (a pattern discussed further in Chapter 6). In other words, in contrast to the discovery group, their sense of learner identity and possibility clearly embraced formal education as one of many options for meeting needs for stimulation and development, for whatever purposes. Finally, all but Derek in this group clearly self-identified as middle class. Derek's background, however, as discussed previously in Chapter 4, provided him with many advantages and compensating influences that were analogous to those described in the stories of those who identified as middle class.

This group was similar to the previous one in their conviction that learning outside the system was significant, and did not require validation by the formal system for it to be of worth. They also communicated a similar sense of discovery and excitement in connection with learning outside the system. Unlike the previous group, however, this was not because of the contrast it afforded to previous experiences at school, or because for the first time a sense of learner possibility and identity was triggered.

4. Learning outside as loss of identity and confidence.

As indicated previously, this theme was suggested by a number of adults - all women, and was one that I could appreciate more fully by the time I engaged in the final cross-case, cross-context analysis. In response to my questions about learning and being a learner outside formal education, there was yet again a qualitatively different emphasis in their accounts. For this group, learning outside formal education was not associated with discovery or the active re-building of confidence. For many, particularly those who had worked inside their homes or in low-paid, low-status jobs for many years, learning outside the system was associated with a gradual loss of confidence and a low self-worth. Learning and being a learner did not figure in accounts of their experiences outside formal education. Moreover, what learning they would admit might have occurred was not seen as significant nor as the source of discovery about themselves as learners. It was largely 'taken for granted'. At times, their recollection these periods in their lives conveyed a total loss of confidence and identity, except through others. There are also those in the Discovery group who at one time in their experiences outside formal education felt similarly, and thus, whose stories overlapped with the themes present in this group. A number of accounts capture these themes. (Appendix 30). As Victoria said in the previous 'discovery' section, when referring to learning in her women's group:

Field record: "We [as women] all had (...) similar problems and similar feelings but how you overcome them can be very frightening and I've still got friends who can't raise themselves out of their hole and what they really feel because it is frightening."

Some women felt stuck in dead end jobs. For example, Janet felt, "sick and tired of working for people with so little intelligence and experience. It was a feeling of desperation. I was fed up with boring jobs and wanted something to think about that was interesting. " (VI, 7:058/9) Nancy speaks about having done the same job for eight years,

Field record: "... and although I enjoyed it, I got the point where I wasn't getting much from it. It was getting mundane and

there was nothing else I could do. I'd trained for it. So difficult." (V, 8: 35/2)

Karen also speaks about needing a new direction and her reaction to the, "dead end street of medical secretarial work." She was also doing temporary work, and people kept asking her why she didn't have a permanent job. In this account, she clearly portrays how her own learner identity, as shaped by prior school experiences, embraced little sense of possibility:

Field record: "Well, it worried me, and I also had no guarantee that I was in any way bright. I mean, well I got through school, but I wasn't , I was sort of a tortoise rather than a hare, and of course, all that competition was there then. It reassured me that I wasn't really all that bright." (V, 8: 26/7)

But the majority were homemakers, living through and for others, and finding themselves increasingly without identity, with very low self-esteem and with no sense of possibility.

Connie's story offers one of the clearest portrayals of the themes associated with this group. She married at 19, and had children within 6 months. She describes how she, "felt totally frustrated." In contrast to the strong sense of personal agency suggested by previous accounts, Connie talks about how she picked up one thing after another, each time with enthusiasm, only to abandon it. She read books about how to tackle new hobbies, like macrame, crochet, painting", but was unable to sustain her initial momentum. She comes across as tremendously isolated, describing how her children, "talked only with my husband about serious things and I felt I had nothing of worth."

Connie finally bought an IQ book, "for me", because she felt like "a cabbage. So I got this IQ book and did this secret testing to see if I'm worth anything." Her opportunity for discovery was to come eventually with a return to do an O level on a course for mature women, as described in Chapter 6.

Gaynor speaks about how when she left school she took a , "dead end job in a typing pool where I was a good typist but I was even overlooked for the promotion panel. " (VI, 8:74/16) She appealed and went on to more general office work, "and was somewhat amazed to find I could do it and do it very well. " (ibid) She explained that she did this until she was 28 at which time she got married and began to raise a family. At work, she felt she developed "some idea of my self worth" that compensated for earlier experiences at school: "And then of course I left and brought up a family and have never gone back to work." She explained how she has always read, "but my husband didn't like that (...) He hated me reading because he is not a reader..."

Partners feeling threatened was an all too common theme in women's accounts of attempts to establish a separate sense of identity, which often involved learning of some kind. Eighteen months after she returned to Hillcroft, her marriage broke up.

Janet, who did go out to work, spoke about being in "dull, frustrating jobs. I felt like I was wasting time." (VI, 7:060/7) Similarly to Connie, she refers to a direction-less sense of energy: "So many things interested me and I had no direction." (VI, 7:058/9) When I asked her who helped her as a learner, outside formal education, she replied quickly, "Nobody when I was a mum." (VI, 7:059/8) She did, however, associate having her son with a time of intense learning:

Field record: "That was a really valuable experience. I read a lot generally. I was often on my own and we had a limited income. I had always liked reading. 'Far too much' as my father used to say. I think that was always there for me." (VI, 7:061/6)

This same theme of aimlessness, contrasting with the strong sense of agency in previous accounts, is also echoed by Georgette, who said, "I didn't think I had any sort of capabilities, (...) I have never been taught like Fran to go out and aim at something and to get it. The idea was to be an interesting person." Georgette felt conflicted as to her social class identity, concluding ultimately that she was more working class than middle class. She attributes her later success in her job more to luck, "being in the right place in the right time"

rather than to her own abilities. Similarly, when her child became ill, Georgette felt another opportunity was presented to her, and she took time out, "to listen and learn". When, however, "someone sneered at me for being involved like that" she stopped: "I stopped at my emotional boundaries as well. I didn't find out too much about my child's complaints because it would have been too much for me." Georgette spoke about feeling at one stage like her life was, "like a great hole. I couldn't find anyone who was like me. But I decided I was just doing too much thinking. 'Pull yourself together!' [she said to herself](laughter)[...]" Georgette retrospectively interpreted her difficulties as having been trained, as a woman,

Field record: "... to live vicariously and so I devoted my energies to my husband. He was the creative one and I didn't have any esteem, any confidence or any belief in my abilities. And that's come only recently with doing the course." (I, 9:282/21

Rita captures another theme which dominates across the accounts: that of 'making the best of a difficult situation.' Having been left by her husband with two small children under two, she was supported by social workers, and eventually a therapy group. But she spoke about how long it took her to, "get feeling o.k. about myself, more or less. " She talks about a Family Centre which gradually built her up. But she said it was five or six years before she felt able to measure herself not solely in terms of other peoples' approval. For Rita, her small but critically important discovery, particularly in terms of later becoming a learner at Hillcroft, was that, people still liked her, even though she was, "talking a lot more freely about myself." (VII, 8: 73/17)

Penny also speaks about how her marriage was not very good, and how, she,

Field record: "... had a low opinion of myself. I didn't realise how low. (...) I had been for counselling. He [her husband] is a very clever man. I was the idiot. Not really (laughter BUT YOU CLASSED YOURSELF AS THAT? Yes, as such. I hadn't had much education. I had taken the 11+ back in those days and had hoped I

would pass but didn't pass (...) and I've always failed but it never stopped me from doing something but whenever I did something it was because nobody else wanted to do it. (*She added with an element of self-deprecating humour*) I've had a very full life because of it! "(V, 8: 45/1-2)

(Two additional accounts of women making the best of their situations are provided by Vera and Nicole in Appendix 30.)

In story after story, women for whom learning and being a learner was not really at issue outside formal education, described living through and for others, and consequently, losing any sense of their own self-worth. Their strengths and their immense capacity to embrace the well being and experience of others (Baker Miller, 1978), with humour and tenacity, remained unrecognised and under-valued by others. Thus, their need for affirmation for others is at issue in their lives outside formal education, and will continue to be a central issue when they return.

Most of these adults had left school with little sense of any learner identity or possibility, that embraced formal education as an option. One wonders if some were not the 'invisible children' whom one often hears spoken of recently. But in such accounts, we see the extent to which, after their period of initial education, they felt at sea with themselves and their lives. In contrast to the lifelong learners and those who were fortunate enough to discover a sense of learner identity and possibility, they conveyed a sense of feeling progressively without any identity whatsoever. Their return to formal education will come about largely through chance encounters, with information or with people. These stories indicate that their sense of disjunction with themselves and their lives is such that there is a certain readiness for change.

I was struck by how powerfully and painfully the weighty feeling of 'dead-endedness' came over when women in the study spoke about this period in their lives. I wonder if these themes would have more or less powerful if I had interviewed them before they returned to formal education. In other words, these adults were speaking about

their previous situation from a position of greater strength, status and confidence. Oblique references lace the accounts, however, and suggest the impact of feeling once upon a time as if they had, and indeed were, "nothing of worth" despite all they gave to their husbands, their children, and their bosses.

4. Learning outside as second best.

Another group, all middle class and all women, also found it difficult to find much meaning in my questions about learning and being a learner outside formal education, but for altogether different reasons. For these women, such learning was second best and taken for granted. Significant learning only occurred through formal education, or 'school like' activity, where progress and achievement were easily measured. This group provided a sharp contrast to those who had experienced discovery and readily found meaning in my questions. This contrasting meaning for learning outside arose in Cycles 2 and 3, after I had been immersed in a flood of stories from Cityside with a very different and thoroughly unanticipated flavour. With this group, it felt as if we began to force meanings for learning, that went beyond their own conceptual frameworks. It was ^{as} if I was speaking a foreign language, and they would kindly accommodate me!

For example, Amy had something to prove, wishing to use her achievement after leaving school as a means of 'socking it to' her previous classmates and teachers. Amy's accounts of learning outside formal education still are almost entirely tied up with structured, other directed, organised activity. Amy's meanings for learning inside formal education were derived from doing a PGCE, an M.Phil, and specialist diplomas. Outside, she spoke about,

Field record: "... learning to ride a horse, and to exercise and setting terribly high standards. (...)I have just started jazz dancing so there is a great physical side of activity that I am getting very good enjoyment and learning out of, and can see I am progressing. "(II, 7:08/47)

She spoke about doing her, "own in-service" training, since what was on offer was, "not very interesting or exciting and you didn't feel you were learning very much." (010/35) Equally, when she was feeling a sense of isolation while doing her M.Phil, she joined a choir, which she saw as, a "good learning experience (...) because it was a group. I was doing everything on my own. (...) Enjoyed it and it was a good contrast to my studies. " (II, 7:015/27)

Nina's responses to my questions about learning and being a learner outside education made me feel distinctly uncomfortable. She had moved in and out of formal education, and structured learning experiences, throughout her life: the pattern which I shall discuss in Chapter 6. The interview felt awkward throughout, as she answered my questions politely and factually. She described herself as "conforming" at school, and in Chapter 4, I illustrated the 'all of a piece' theme, and the strong sense of accountability, that came across in her story. She appreciated the course she was on for its participative style. But my sense of Nina was that her identity was so thoroughly lodged in school-like meanings for learning and being a learner that our exploration had little meaning for her altogether.

In contrast Pamela, on the same course, suggested that for most of her life, her sense of learner identity had been strongly lodged in formal education. Since completing her university degree, straight after school, Pamela had since done two professional training courses, and attended all sorts of short courses.

Pamela had only recently discovered alternative meanings for learning and being a learner at age 50, through her experience, paradoxically, on the very programme which I had helped to set up, as described in Chapter 1. This caused her to reflect on previous experiences within formal education, and to feel a sense of betrayal and loss:

Field record:: "It is a regret in a sort of way. My learning was mostly academic. But the other bit of it all, at what stage would I have been prepared to let myself go? Because I think that all comes in to it. (...) But I feel I could have been, or helped to be so. " (III, 7/9: p. 12)

On the training programme, Pamela discovered learning for the first time that made her feel, "engaged as a total person. Feeling as well as sort of mind and emotionally. Learning emotionally, not just facts." (III, 7/9: 17) It was also pleasurable, and different from anything she had experienced previously. (III, 7/9: 8) She found herself able to decide if her reading, suited her purpose. "Whereas in the past, I would have felt I had to read it, come what may, if it was recommended. That is a difference." She found the experience of the course also unseated deep learning about her role as a student in relation to teachers:

Field record : "Like in school days, teachers held a very particular sort of position, and it takes a long time to outgrow that. But I now feel more equal. But there is still, I have noticed, it's a bit worrying, how the teacher role creeps back."

At the time of the interview, I made the following note:

Field record: Reflection - Was feeling quite overwhelmed by what she was saying. Especially irony of fact that the course I had developed was her focal point for a profound change in meaning about learning. An affirmation that was quite powerful. Here was this woman who was expressing regret, a sense of loss, at what she never had, because she never had experienced anything else until her 50's. What so many people expressed to me when I was working with [the programme]. (III, Pamela, Interview transcript, p. 11)

(An additional illustration of this theme is provided by Jane in Appendix 31)

I believe that these accounts illuminate a different dimension to the experience of learning outside formal education. Meanings for learning outside formal education seem to be tied up with school-like progress, achievement and structured activity. Personal growth and development outside are important, but not "enriching" in the way it is within formal education. A sense of validation comes from achievement within formal education, proving to themselves and others that they can do it. Pamela, at age 53, had only just discovered other meanings

for learning and for being a learner.

Thus, in this set of accounts, being a learner and learning are not at issue outside formal education in the same ways as for others, as described in Sections 2 and 3. A sense of learner identity and possibility will be seen to come through a return to formal education, although for the majority of these women, this option does not really figure in their 'life-worlds.' Someone or something will plant the seed of possibility, but there, for some learning and being a learner will for the first time in their lives have meaning and be of significance.

6. Reflections

Once these adults left school, differentiating patterns associated with the individual trajectories of their lives seemed to take shape. The thematic groupings suggested above are by no means offered as a typology, but rather as a way of capturing my own particular interpretations of dominant themes that were most explicit in their stories about this particular period of their lives, and about their learning outside formal education. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, an interrelatedness of multiple and shifting realities and meanings for learning will increasingly be in evidence, as threads of learner experience weave together to shape a sense of learner identity and possibility. Moreover, even in accounts of learning outside, more than one theme could be echoed with a particular life story, although one often seemed to predominate: either in effecting a re-structuring of their own sense of learner identity and possibility, or in its influence on how they made sense of their return to formal education.

At this point, I offer the following summary illustrating how I associated key themes with particular participants' stories related to learning outside education. I also indicate those whom I felt unable to associate with any particular theme, and those whom I would associate with more than one, indicating with parentheses the theme that seemed to run in counterpoint to the prevailing one, as conveyed through their present day construct system.

● Discovery:

- Through pain and struggle: Godfrey, Janice, Patricia, Susan, Sally, (Frank), Bill, (Georgette), (Rita), (Laurence)
- Through fortuitous circumstances: Laurence, Victoria, Todd, Diane, Darcy, Fran, (Pamela), Sheila, Frank
- Learning outside as another dimension to lifelong learning: Peter, Derek, (Sheila), Raissa, (Karen), (Jane), (Todd), (Godfrey),
- Learning outside as loss of identity and confidence: Connie, Gaynor, Penny, Georgette, Alex, Rhoda, Vera, Rita, Karen, Nicole, Penny, (Victoria), Janet, Andrea, Georgette, (Diane), (Janice), Ethel, (Darcy)
- Learning outside as second best: Amy, Jane, Nina, Pamela, (Andrea), (Nicole), (Janet), (Derek), (Alex)

Uncertain: Marion (due to foreshortened interview and insufficient life story material; Nancy (there were hints of all of these themes, but no one theme seemed to dominate);

Voice 2: In each of these patterns I can find aspects of my own story, about what it has meant to be a learner outside formal education. Through reflections on my own experience, I can illuminate the permeable edges of, and possible interweavings for, these groupings. It is in Jane's story that I can most easily locate myself, prior to coming to England. Like her, I valued my experience outside formal education, but genuine affirmation and validation could only occur within formal education itself. Thus, my years of working were filled with much challenge, change, development and learning. But my own learner identity was such that I saw this as not really counting until I turned it into a further degree. It was this aim that I was heading to Boston to fulfill.

My unexpected detour to England landed me in a situation where I too felt I had little choice but to serve and survive. Although I was fortunate in finding employment in a new culture, I nonetheless suffered considerable loss of self-esteem. The longer I was away from formal education, the more I tended to de-value my experience and the considerable learning that was resulting from it. Ironically, the content with which I was working was about 'learning', and in particular, adult learning and teaching and learning processes relevant to staff/professional development. But my own conceptual framework blocked me from seeing that learning and being a learner were also personally at issue. For me, my aspirations and needs as a learner had been placed on hold when I changed countries. My own previous socialisation, into identification with the formal education system, did not easily allow for any other conceptualisation.

The return was very unsettling. As discussed in Chapter 1, I tried to make sense of my experience as a mature student in particular ways. I attributed my confusion and my sense of feeling de-skilled to the fact that pedagogical, not andragogical assumptions, (in the sense of Knowles, 1978) underpinned approaches to the curriculum in

my own higher education setting. Only through this study could I realise that it was far more complex than that. The effect of my years as a learner and being a learner outside formal education, where I channelled the frustration from not doing a PhD into my work, fundamentally changed my relationship to formal education. Moreover, I came to recognise the disjunction that I experienced between my 'learned' sense of learner identity, influenced by previous 'all of a piece feelings' at school, and the alternative learner identity I was evolving as a result of experiences outside education. What I eventually realised through this study is that the period of 'de-socialisation', in another culture, on another route, beginning as it were without status, money or influence, resulted in my own meanings for learning evolving in ways that felt at odds with those that tended to operate in higher education. A quote from Pope and Keen seems to capture some aspects of the dilemma in which I, and I realise now, others, can be caught:

"(...)many different views on what education is, and should be, can and do co-exist. It seems to us that problems arise when an individual or group operate with one set of assumptions and tries to impose or communicate these assumptions to others without any acknowledgement or understanding of an alternative framework or set of assumptions which the other values." (Pope and Keen, 1981)

This study enabled me to explore my tacit knowledge that meanings about learning and being a learner were firstly, very much at issue when speaking about widening access to higher education; moreover, these assumptions and meanings have been shaped by far more than school based experience. Moreover, I gradually came to realise that the experiences of women on my own programmes, as described in Chapter 1, may also have served as 'discovery experiences': compensating for damage to self-esteem, and building a sense of learner identity that eventually might encompass the idea of a return to formal education. For others, like Pamela, the courses often revealed dimensions of themselves as learners, and meanings for learning, that also resulted in a sense of discovery. I began to feel more validated for my learning outside higher education. I also came to realise the extent to which adults on that programme, and their responses to what was on offer, had subtly but powerfully, helped to change my own meanings for learning and being a learner.

The discoveries rooted in the process of this study, coupled with my own 'sense making' of my own return to higher education, has led to me identifying now far more with the lifelong learners. A sense of integration, and indeed of self-worth, is now lodged more wholly within me. Learning wherever it occurs, is validated by many criteria, not merely those of institutions. But how easily I might have projected my own formalised meanings for learning outside education and blinkered myself, through another type of study, where I as the 'human instrument' might have remained invisible and detached, acting as if knowledge was 'out there.'

CHAPTER 6: BECOMING A MATURE STUDENT MAKING AND ANTICIPATING THE CHANGE

1. Introduction

Chapter 5 explored the different meanings and kinds of significance that study participants attributed to their experiences of learning outside the system, and whether or how their sense of learner identity embraced the possibility of formal education.

In this Chapter, I shall focus on several dimensions relating to these adult learners' return to study in a formal learning context, as based on my analysis of their retrospective reflections:

- patterns and orientations associated with returning;
- how the change was anticipated

This chapter will offer a more complex picture about the experience of adults who return to some kind of formal learning context than is usually presented in the literature on adult returners. This picture is enriched and sharpened by a deeper understanding of individual's prior experiences of learning and being a learner, inside and outside formal education.

2. Some orientations and patterns associated with returning: an overview

2.1. Orientations

Some interesting patterns are suggested by these retrospective accounts, concerning why adults return to a formal learning context. On the one hand, there are those who seem to have consciously decided to return. They speak about having had clear aims against which they evaluated particular choices. They tend to be people who largely but not exclusively, had experienced a sense of integration in their dealings with the system. I refer to this as 'moving towards' orientation. It combines with what I have termed an 'in and out' pattern in relation to formal education. In other words, those with a 'moving towards' orientation tended to make regular use of offerings

and opportunities in formal education. This was characteristic of both the lifelong learners and those for whom learning was most meaningful in a formal environment, as described in Chapter 5. Overall, this group conveys their belief in the value of formal education for advancement - be it personal or career, and demonstrates how their sense of learner identity easily embraces it as an option.

Others were shown in Chapter 5 to have a sense of learner identity that did not embrace the possibility of a formal education. Their prior experiences at school had undermined, or never really nurtured this. Their accounts of returning tend to be characterised by stories of fortuitous circumstances or encounters with chance information which gave rise to the idea of a return. Their basic dissatisfaction with their own lives provided the fertile soil for the idea to take hold, and for them to go along with the opportunity or active encouragement which presented itself. This set of accounts seems characterised less by a clear sense of 'moving toward', but more one of 'moving out of' disjunction in their own lives, or away from a sense of despair, loss of identity, and frustration. There are still others for whom various emphases seem to be operating simultaneously.

These broad orientations will be explored as a kind of counterpoint against the four patterns of returning.

2.2. Patterns of returning to higher education

The first of the four patterns of returning to higher education suggested by the data entails doing O and A levels in higher education as a route to further study, through which sufficient confidence and encouragement to go on to higher degree or diploma is gained. For some of these adults, there may have been a gap between doing the qualification(s) and actually returning.

The second is through short course springboards, such as a 'return to learning' course, or one which sufficiently developed confidence and a desire for further stimulation and structured learning (such as a counselling course). (The latter would have been seen retrospectively as strategic in propelling the return.)

The third pattern is characterised by direct entry. Since Hillcroft's two year diploma was set up as the equivalent of the first year of a degree course, I include in this group the women who went directly onto this programme.

The fourth pattern I call 'in and out', as suggested above. This characterises the professionals who have engaged in various educational and structured learning opportunities, since completing their initial education, but who, at the time of this study, still had a gap of three years since any such engagements.

2.3. Interweavings of how and why

These accounts continue to illustrate the impact of prior learning, within and outside education, on the expectations and patterns of these adults lives as learners, and the complexity of the conditions and circumstances surrounding their return to higher education. The how and the why of their returns are inextricably intertwined with their past. Barriers and incentives, categories that predominate in the literature on access and adult participation in higher education, are seen to interweave with other restraining or facilitating forces.

The sense of vulnerability that can be generated by a return will characterise many accounts of why and how these men and women returned to higher education. These themes are all the more visible in the accounts of those whose previous experiences of education were characterised by disjunction. Some adults show their increased resilience and determination, partly due to their own discoveries about themselves as learners and learning outside the system . However, engagement with the formal system can all too easily re-activate memories of previous disjunction, and vulnerabilities long forgotten, as is suggested by some of these accounts and will become increasingly evident in Chapter 7.

3. Returning: how and why

3.1. Further education as a route back to formal education

A number of the adults in this study assumed that entry into higher education was fully dependent upon A and O levels. As evidenced by Appendix 3, many had left with few or no qualifications. Six working class and five middle class adults, (nine^{wo} men and two men -all white), across those interviewed individually, took some kind of further qualification at A or O level, after which (and for some after a further gap) they returned to some form of higher education.

Some rather detailed accounts are used to illustrate the key themes in the stories of adults who used this route back: Laurence, Connie, Vera, Karen and Frank. with an additional account by Darcy. (Appendix 32) Each of these mini case studies capture key themes relating to how prior lifelong learning experiences can influence the expectations and experiences of becoming a mature student. Gender and social-class related dimensions of identity will also be seen to be at issue directly.

3.1.1. Laurence: after discovery

Laurence's Marshall Keate 'learning journey', introduced in Chapter 5, enabled him to discover his own potential as a learner, and a sense of excitement and discovery about self and interest directed learning. For the first time in his life, his sense of learner identity embraced the possibility of a return to formal education. He began to consider doing some kind of further study, despite his earlier difficulties with writing and reading. His growing confidence that he was neither 'illiterate' or 'stupid' made a great deal of difference to his self-esteem. When he was made redundant as a mechanic, having also been a local councillor for a number of years, he saw an opportunity: "What to do now? Why not education? This 'thing' I never had before." He figured that he needed to do some O levels, but in his account, there was no sense of any strategic planning as to what O levels might lead to what kind of course for what purposes. He took two subjects out of interest. Soon thereafter,

he suffered a breakdown, which he attributed to other factors other than his studying. He was an outpatient for two years at a psychiatric hospital. He then decided that he had to tackle his problems with reading (discovering later that he was dyslexic) and he went to an Adult Education centre for "illiterates". They rejected him because he expressed his interest in doing O levels in English and Politics: "And I still used to walk out of classes, since I was still suffering from depression. But it became a fixation with me. I wanted to go to university."

Laurence eventually did Maths and English O levels, and an A level in Politics. By this time, "I more or less had education out of my system. But I was still faced with what should I do." His outpatient status also made him feel "unstable. So I decided to have a go. " Through his links as a councillor, he got to know people at the polytechnic, and he was actively encouraged by several to consider his options: "And I discovered this one. Which was more what I'm interested in. (...) It was also local so that took care a lot of practicalities."

Laurence's story illustrates a need to move out of crisis: redundancy, depression, and his status as an outpatient. He also had some notion of 'moving towards' higher education. At that time, gaining access and fulfilling his long-term 'fixation', as he refers to it, was his main goal. It seemed learning that he was dyslectic, not illiterate, and his experience of his discovery in relation to his research into the history of the Marshall Keate pub, as discussed in Chapter 5, enabled him to develop his own sense of possibility as a learner., This contrasted considerably with the identity he had as a learner based on his previous experience of schooling. With regard to the 'how', themes which were repeated with consistent regularity across accounts include the use of personal informal networks, and the encouragement of particular individuals.

3.1.2. Connie: from 'feeling like a cabbage'

In recent years, the idea of the 'woman returner' has increasingly etched its way into public consciousness , through for example,

films such as 'Educating Rita', the influence of the women's movement and general public awareness of the Open University. Connie's story illustrates key issues which run through the accounts of women homemakers who eventually returned to higher education. Previously, I referred to her description of , "feeling like a cabbage" when she was at home, and doing 'secret testing' with the I.Q. test. Connie conveys how much energy and courage it can take to make the decision to return to formal education. The strategic role of friendships in encouraging people such as Connie to return once again comes across. She had a friend who was studying at a further education college. This led her to conclude that she , "wasn't too stupid. But it took me six months to get up the courage. (...) I felt like a man going to the scaffold. It was the agony of making the decision."

The time lag between consciously thinking about the possibility of formal education and actually returning was not uncommon. In many accounts, confidence, fears of being made to feel inadequate (again?) and particularly for women, guilt about doing something for themselves, are at issue. Many seem to require 'permission' and active encouragement from family and friends to follow through and sustain the beginnings of the return. Connie describes needing to be pushed, "to go into the classroom" and how once there, she had no idea what to do: "I didn't know what to take down and what not to. I just copied everything they said." The isolation she felt previously at home is poignantly conveyed by her statement, "I just wanted to feel a part of the group."

The further education college helped to repair Connie's considerably damaged self-esteem to some extent: "It was a good learning experience. It was geared to mature students. (...) The course was best for my self confidence. More so than for learning." She described how this growing confidence enabled the mature students to begin to see themselves and their tutors as "human beings and to debate about what they are teaching and to express their beliefs. You felt you had something to contribute." In thinking about herself as a learner inside and outside formal education, she talks about how she moved from feeling "like a cabbage, as described in Chapter 5, to realising that, "I had been learning. I had always been conscious of what was

going on in the world, but I was not aware of this until then. ...Funny, I still had that cabbage feeling." She was, however, encouraged to go on to do A levels, which she found stressful: "Too much challenge. I got tense and I still had these self doubts."

Here, the themes of feeling valued, respected and validated, and needing to feel engaged as an equal in dialogue with tutors, are ones which will recur again and again in Chapter 7. The precariousness of Connie's self-esteem is sadly characteristic, particularly of women who have worked largely in their homes. Connie's account of how her confidence continually wavered, and the extent to which she was dependent upon others' assessment of her is also typical in the accounts of women who would see themselves as 'only housewives'. Moreover, in Connie's account, as in those of many women returners particularly, the upward and downward slopings of confidence can be seen to be almost entirely dependent upon people and criteria external to themselves: "Each time I got a letter saying I had passed, it was nothing but elation. But it would only last five minutes. Bit like a ladder. Constantly saying, Can I do better?"

But climbing the ladder brought its own sense of disjunction, in terms of her situation: "I reached a stop [after A levels]. I had done all this learning. I had enjoyed it. But I thought, I can't go back to nothing." Various tutors suggested she do a degree. The extent to which Connie's sense of learner identity was still lodged outside of formal education, and in this case, higher education, is strikingly evident: "I had never even considered it. Still decided on external values, not inside."

She applied to do a polytechnic degree course and was accepted. Even when it happened, she describes how it had a sense of unreality for her: "It was a marvellous feeling, all the way from here to the tube. Facing the unknown. I was a mature student taking a degree!!" Then, however the bubble burst: "Other things hit, like making tea and reality!"

The reality surrounding Connie's return, and the energy required to make and sustain being a mature student, included a husband who was

increasingly threatened by her growing confidence - fragile though it was. Her experience of being with other women, and of the course content, caused her to look increasingly at herself as a woman. "My mother's role. A woman's place. I felt frustrations of that. My own experience of that role." She was increasingly aware of how once her husband decided that what she was doing was not a hobby but for real, "it became a threat to his position and our relationship." A point came when communication completely broke down. She sat down and wrote him a long letter, "telling him about my values and everything. It worked. He had to sit and read it. This eased the tension. At last he could see what I was getting at." Her husband gradually acknowledged that, "my gaining that knowledge was real, not a hobby and the possible result was going to work. He could see it either as a threat to all we had or he had to change." But she also told him, "all the barriers against going back to my old life."

Connie describes her experience in terms that Mezirow (1977) has described as "perspective transformation" - something he found common in women's accounts of returning. For Mezirow, this entails an thorough re-evaluation of one's role in relationship to society and its expectations of women. As Connie says, "You were aware that something was happening to you. I didn't understand what it was though, and then there was a lot of tension and conflict." This 'something happening' began when she was doing O levels, but it took her until the time of her A levels to get up the courage to put down all that she was feeling and experiencing and suddenly hoping for in a letter to her husband.

The continuing spiral of disjunction and integration that she experienced over the course of this study is captured by her description of re-reading the letter, in the third year of her degree course: "It seemed just as relevant to then as it does to now. I am still going through the changes." In Chapter 9, in Connie's comments on the final analysis, written from the perspective of having left her husband, the power of this continuing spiral is accentuated.

Connie also illustrates how many compensating experiences may be needed to give rise to a developmental trend away from dependency

and 'feeling like a cabbage' towards increased centredness. In contrast, an internal sense of integration as a learner, and a strong sense of learner identity and possibility, particularly in relation to formal education, is already suggested by the lifelong learners. But Connie's pattern predominates in the accounts of women whose prior experience of education was characterised by disjunction, and who have worked largely in their homes. It will be some time before they too establish their own centredness as a learner.

3.1.3. Vera: Putting others first

Vera's story illustrates in more detail how often women's lives are such that it is difficult for them to think in any other terms except to put others first. As recounted previously, Vera increasingly felt the need to create the life she wanted herself, rather than depending upon her husband. She eventually decided to do an O level in order to learn more about her children's experience of the British education system. Her choice of a course, however, was determined solely by what was available on the night that her husband could, "seriously assure me he would be home so I could go out." She describes the O level course as, "a very interesting experience. All women, mature women, about eight of us in the beginning." Although the numbers diminished, Vera talks about how interesting she found it, "Just being with them."

This learning experience, characterised by a strong sense of integration, led to Vera applying for a job at a university library: something she had not done since she had married. Her lack of recent experience and training caused her to be unsuccessful in one way, in that she did not get the job. The woman who interviewed her, however, actively encouraged Vera to update her skills. Once again the extent to which higher education did not occur to many in this study as an option is illustrated by Vera's comment, "She really put the idea into my head at this interview."

Meanwhile, she got a part-time library job which she found very frustrating since, "I knew more about the library than the librarian" and although she was running it, this was not recognised in her pay or

by him: "That really made me, "Grrr..." Vera was not free to act on the idea of updating her skills, however, until her mother in law died, since she had the responsibility for looking after her. Meanwhile, her children were moving up to doing their own exams at school, and were soon to be leaving home: "I could see that my days were going to be completely free. " At this time, she read about Hillcroft somewhere, and she wrote in and received a leaflet: "The leaflet said all sorts of things that really appealed". She came for interview and was, " offered a place. Fully residential." Once again, in Vera's accounts of her return, we see the critical role that individuals can play in encouraging adults to explore their possibilities. We also see the extent to which women can feel that until their responsibilities of looking after others are satisfied - husbands, adult relations, and children - there is little sense of feeling able to develop their own identity, and to act on choices for returning that might present themselves. Vera, as did many other women, put aside her interests and ambitions in relation to her husband's schedule and her mother-in-law's needs. In their encounters with Further Education, they experienced a sense of discovery and affirmation, particularly through being with others. As such, they began to face the challenge of changing their life patterns.

3.1.4. Karen: Squeezing learning around work

Karen, as mentioned in the previous Chapter, was thoroughly fed up with the dead end nature of her job as a medical secretary, and craved something more: but what that 'something more' might be or how she might go about getting it came across as more problematic. She decided to do an O level in English. Like with many of the others, this led her to new possibilities.

Karen's experience of learning in a small group with a tutor on a subject which she loved, helped her to learn more about the conditions under which she best was able to benefit as a learner. For the first time she felt a sense of integration, and even "inspiration." This experience was grounded in the relationship she felt she developed with her tutor in a group of three, eventually around the tutor's kitchen table. She described how she used to

arrive "tired, exhausted. But enthusiastic. The tutor was great. (...) we just connected." Although in some respects she found this learning experience similar to school, "in terms of shovelling information and spewing it out" what was significantly different for Karen was the experience of, feeling valued: "Everything you said was discussed. I think I was really lucky there." She contrasts this experience with school, which she had "hated". Competition was one concern for Karen but she also felt inhibited by, "scholarship, money, religion. Treated as children. You were treated as a child. You weren't respected as a person. "

Karen's experience of learning in this way significantly influenced her expectations and subsequent choices of learning contexts. She learned about Hillcroft from a friend, and when she reached a "state of desperation" with her job, she "took the plunge." She explains how, after much procrastination, she wrote, when she thought it was too late to apply. But she was asked to come for interview:

Field record:" Such positives! I just sort of reeled out the door in this state of euphoria (*laughter*) Really feeling, "Gosh, I'm o.k.!" Yeah, somebody wanted me, such a positive response. 'Come' sort of thing rather than negative sort of thing that I didn't take account of anything at all! That's it. It just inspired me. I was on the brink and that just confirmed it! " (V, 8: ,7)

3.1.5. Frank: Hurdles and more hurdles from painter to mature student

Finally, Frank also used O and A levels as his primary route back, although this was paralleled with discovery through political activity. After leaving school at 15 with no qualifications, and becoming an apprentice decorator, he described how in his early 20's he became bored with this: "I also consumed large numbers of books. I started with a correspondence course and did a few lessons at O level." Although he became "fed up with how it was presented", he decided, "what the hell, and arranged to take the exams as an external student."

Rather than probing on how he did on these exams, I chose instead to ask him more about his reading. This opened up a rich realm of experience: "history, political history, psychology, philosophy, some theology, sociology and a bit of economics and current affairs. Mostly library books. When I was unemployed I used to read 9 books per week."

Further questioning surfaced his loneliness at this time, since,

Field record: "...there were no people around me to discuss with. My dad felt threatened. My mum worried. Kept saying, You can't do O levels, you're not intelligent enough. But I got A grades."

Frank described his parents as being caught up in the "mystique of exams, seeing them as an insurmountable barrier." He described how he too had absorbed that message at school:

Field record: "When I passed my O's I was surprised. Had an inferiority complex. Still feel that complex. To do with being working class. Intellectually and socially conditioned to not believe I would do these things."

His decision to do A levels resulted from a chance encounter with a teacher: he rescued her daughter when she was knocked down by a car! He started going out with her, and, "her mum kept pushing for me to do A levels. " But the barriers in himself, reinforced by long experience at school, felt insurmountable: "You see, at school, I had always been known as an under-achiever. I was told that but I didn't believe it."

In order to return, Frank had to overcome not only barriers of confidence and low self-esteem, despite his obvious intelligence and love of reading, but also of social class. He was fully dependent upon getting a grant from the local authority, but sadly he encountered a,

Field record: "... corpulent gentleman on a large salary [who] asked me why I wanted to do it. I said I need some qualifications. I don't like my work. He said, "Why don't you get a job as a farm labourer?"

He persisted, drawing on his savings and eventually going on social security while attending as a part-time student: "What really pissed me off was signing on when the English class was doing Orwell. " He described how for him, that course material was, "one of the more interesting bits. One of the few for that matter and I had to miss it." The reason for this was that the distance he had to travel and his unemployment required him to, " wait for the County Council Coach which was free. If I didn't catch it I was stuck. So when I signed on, I had to hitch a ride."

Orwell came up in a number of accounts as a vehicle for discovery. The themes on which he writes seems to have spoken directly to these adults' experience, opening them up to a sense of possibility. Frank describes how the impact of earlier school experiences can surface with a return to formal education: "I was not socially accepted by most of the people in the upper stream [at school] When I went to college I only wanted a discussion forum. " He found the lecture mode stultifying, and would "engineer arguments.(...)the passivity irritated me." All the while, however, he describes his feeling at this time: "One of excitement. Because I was finally away from manual work. Something else was happening. I felt I might have a chance of a much more interesting job." All the while, Frank felt frustrated by the reluctance of those around with him to engage in argument at the level he wished. He also describes his self-consciousness about speaking with others, "even though the majority in each subject were under 25 and had failed their A levels in the local grammar school. I think they were frightened of me."

Frank used his continual learning from his discovery of his capacities for abstract thinking and argument through political activity, during such sessions, He became even more confident about his own sense of possibility as a learner. For the first time, he had some sense of a learner identity in relation to formal education.

Frank's story captures so many of the themes in working class adults' learning life histories, discussed in Chapter 4 with regard to previous initial education. His isolation and sense of disjunction, in his home and the school environment; his hunger for dialogue; the

internalisation of others' expectations, to the extent that the few relationships that might have compensated for his disjunction were too little too late; the role of a personal relationship and a fascinating case of serendipity (his English teacher's daughter's accident) in propelling him on to further formal study; the institutionalised pressures to equate 'learning with achievement' - a defense I was able to get beyond in our interview; the influence of his prior learning on the interpretative framework within which he anticipated and made sense of his initial subsequent educational experience; and the role of discovery and learning outside the system in creating a more centred sense of himself as a learner and his capacities.

Where Frank's story is also interesting is in comparison with the accounts of the women. Although both Frank and Laurence speak about inferiority complexes, and how they had internalised reactions to their class position from others, their emphases seemed different from the women's. For example, they came across to me as far less oriented to affirmation through relationships. This yearning for argument, or for the stimulation of pitting oneself against another, is evident also in Godfrey and Derek's accounts, is not something that ever occurred in women's stories. They too yearned for a kind of intellectual stimulation, yes, but always in the context of learning with others and in the sense of building on others ideas, rather than taking up a position. This 'positioning' and argument theme occurs in many of the men's stories and is noticeably absent in many of the women's, and is a theme echoed by other research discovered towards the end of the study. (e.g., Belenky et al, 1986; Gilligan,¹⁹⁸²)

Additional excerpts from Frank's interview, including his initial suspicion at the outset of the interview, how I handled it, and memories of a math teacher who seemed to symbolise for him his earlier experiences of school are offered in Appendix 32. A further account from Darcy illustrates how a mentor at work once again awoke her sense of discovery and encouraged her to do O and A levels. This was after she had given up her 'learning projects' (described in Chapter 5) when she married, lest she threaten her husband.

3.2. Other course springboards

The complexity of circumstances, and the role of serendipity is again evident in the accounts of those who used other kinds of courses as their way of beginning to return to higher education. (Appendix 33) The kinds of courses that for some provided the springboard back to an academic formal context included counselling training; returning to learning classes; employer based or vocational short courses; and courses run by voluntary organisations, such as Marriage Guidance Council (now called Relate).

For example, Diane's self-help group, referred to in Chapter 5, followed by her training in counselling, gave her the confidence to risk study in formal education. Here I asked her to describe her previous training:

Field record: "One weekend per month, one evening per week, plus extras such as five day intensive courses, workshops, work with a guide. Straight away I felt good. It was like being at home. I said to myself, 'This is what it is all about. This is what got lost in learning. " (I, 7:3/24)

Diane's training significantly compensated for the disjunction that had characterised so much of her experience of initial education, as did Patricia's re-evaluation course experience counselling in Israel as told in Chapter 5. In Chapter 7, we shall see the influence of these learning experiences on the interpretative frameworks they used to make sense of their experience of higher education, and on their subsequent sense of disjunction. Diane actually started to do an A level at a local technical college, when, with the help of Ethel, she managed direct entry. Her situation, therefore, cuts across these various patterns of returning. However, as will be clear in Chapter 7, it was the experience of her counselling training over 2 years that was most significant in terms of enabling her to manage the sense of disjunction she was to feel.

Andrea lived near Hillcroft college and learned about their 'Returning to Learning course': a 13 week course aimed at women who have had a

long break since completing their initial education. Here, in our individual interview which followed an earlier group interview with two others, I asked her about how she had come to choose Hillcroft. Andrea's children were becoming more independent, and she decided it was unfair,

Field record: "... that they should have a conscience about going off and doing what they wanted to do (...) so I thought if I fulfill myself as well it won't matter. They can say, we can go out because mother isn't going around the bend."

Like so many women who were parents and partners, she considered her needs only in relation to others' needs, rather than autonomously. She described how she tended to let things "just wash over me" rather than seizing opportunities. She went to the library and found a leaflet about Hillcroft. It was her daughter who continually prodded her to fill it in. In Andrea's story we find themes that run through so many of the stories of those whose prior experiences of school were characterised largely by disjunction and also those of women. Her sense of learner identity was in no way tied up with the notion of formal education. For her, "people who went on to HE from school were a breed apart and the thoughts of coming back into education, I think I felt quite the same about. " Although Andrea had come from a middle class home, she nonetheless had internalised the message that HE was not for the likes of her. Now, at this juncture in her life, although she had a need and a desire to move away from her situation home, in order to reassure her children to also move away, formal education did not really figure as an option: "So if I heard about other housewives who had gone off and done something, I thought, 'Oh dear, they must be ever so different. "

Her experience of Hillcroft changed her own sense of learner identity and possibility: "...to come here and to be treated as an equal by the tutors was an absolute eye opener. And Phoebe [the principal] went out of her way too, if you said, 'Only a housewife' she goes through the roof. (laughter)"

Andrea also admits that since the college was so close to her home, and since entry was facilitated by the returning to learning programme, "it was easy." She asserted that to have done O and A levels would have required something more from her that she just didn't have: not in terms of intelligence, but , in her words,

Field record: "... the awareness that I could have done it. YOU MEAN PASSING ALL THOSE OBSTACLES FIRST? yes, and the college gave you this attitude, there is nothing to stop you.(...) It is quite a phenomenon I think."

Andrea spoke about her realisation that the college offered opportunities that women, "wouldn't gain if men were here. There are no two ways about it. Men do dominate and I think this, the situation here allows women to be themselves and to come out. "

Three other women in this study returned to higher education through the Hillcroft Return to Learning course, and in each of these stories, there is this theme of needing permission or active encouragement from others to feel 'o.k.' about doing a course of study. Also, across all of them, there is the 'moving away from' orientation, rather than any clear sense of moving towards. Andrea captures the feeling that many women in this study had: women who went on to higher education were a 'breed apart' and certainly, 'not like themselves'. She stresses the importance of the all female environment of Hillcroft to building confidence and relationships, and the value of an adult learning approach that made her feel respected as an equal, and thus validated in her own sense of possibility as a learner. As such, Andrea, for the first time began to evolve a sense of learner identity that was tied into formal education.

An additional account of how short courses can help to build the confidence required to make the change to becoming a mature student is offered by Nicole in Appendix 33. Like other women whose stories have been told in this chapter, often refer to learning experiences that they associate with integration as, 'That's me!'. Nicole's attendance at the Good Housekeeping Magazine seminar began a process of discovery

leading to Hillcroft that continued to create a sense of integration, in contrast to the disjunction that had characterised most of her previous education. In Nicole's accounts of such experiences, as in others, an inherent sense of connection is suggested by the language and the personal self-referent terms used to describe them.

3.3. Direct entry

A number of adults in the study went directly into HE. (Appendix 34) The multiple reasons for returning - personal problems, dissatisfaction with job opportunities, needing and wanting personal stimulation - once again emerge. The influence of prior experience on their perceptions of themselves as learners and of particularly higher education, become more apparent.

3.3.1. To traditional higher education

Janice entered directly, after investigating what was available to her at the polytechnic in the area in which she lived. The conditions contributing to her return included personal changes and problems, resulting in a divorce. She had also had a few jobs, but she was limited in her choices due to her lack of qualifications. She was steered initially towards an Access course, despite having that of O's and A levels. One wonders if her being a Black woman influenced this. She said that all her life people had said to her, "Why don't you go to college." Janice explained that she, "had always felt she wasn't good enough." Getting accepted made her realise she had to go through with it, since she had only just split up from her husband and her son was at school: "so everything fitted in. There was no time to get nervous." Janice spoke about how, from the beginning, she was, "proving myself...that I could do it."

'Proving I could do it' is a common theme. It is as if, once the possibility of higher education looms, 'unfinished agendas' from initial education are surfaced. For example, Nancy, who also entered Hillcroft directly, moved onto a polytechnic course, which she later left. She spoke about why she had gone to Hillcroft, explaining how, unlike many of her classmates, she did not come "determined to get a

degree (...) I came here out of interest, intrigue and to find out for myself what I could do and I feel I proved that to myself." (V, 8: 84/5)

Fran and Georgette (Appendix 34) illustrate how many who entered directly felt a sense of disbelief and vulnerability, particularly in environments not especially geared to mature students. A 'plunge in the deep end', 'hot and cold feet', 'slipping in the back door and out again' are the kinds of images that are conjured by their accounts, and mirror similar themes in others. These feelings are enhanced or assuaged by the environment they enter, as will continue to be seen in Chapter 7.

Fran, as discussed previously, was made redundant (and resigned) from her job working with mentally handicapped adults. She visited a "careers chap", but when he suggested she do a degree, "My first reaction was, 'No, I can't." He encouraged her to try it, but she chose instead to see first if she could get a grant. She was astounded that she could get the money to become a full time student, but was unable to persuade her local M.P. that , "Mrs. Thatcher should lend her £5000 to rent a little shop. But she was going to spend £3000 re-educating me." Fran described how she kept trying to get out of it, because she was so frightened. When I asked her what she thought that meant she said, "I don't know. I just didn't think about what it meant." She describes taking some entrance tests, feeling, "scared stiff" and then running, "all the way back to the station, and I never wanted to go back again." She talks about how, during her first year, "I played at it really. I couldn't give up hairdressing. In fact, I still haven't. " In these words, Fran captures the strong sense of disjunction she was experiencing between her own sense of learner identity and the possibilities she had internalised for herself as a child, and this new role vis-a-vis her experience since leaving school. In Chapter 7, this sense of disjunction will continue to be at issue for Fran.

Georgette described how her baby's birth represented a turning point for her. Georgette had discovered learning through her dad who, "had a terrible time at school himself, as a working class man also, and he

was determined that they wouldn't kill it for me. So he taught me to learn things for myself and until I was ten it was dead easy and he taught me everything. " She then had a difficult time at the local grammar school, due to personal circumstances at home, where she, "became more and more successfully disruptive and I decided this wasn't for me." She left at 17, thinking, "it's time to start living."

Georgette had married at 19, and had worked since, as an administrator in restaurants and the arts. When Georgette's baby was born with congenital abnormalities, she became interested in doing further study, motivated by the extent to which she felt disempowered as a parent: "As a mother you can't say anything. Any suggestions you make, you are just sneered at, labelled at, and I had always thought I would do a degree." Like Janice above, Georgette conveys the sense of having a sense of learner identity that embraced the notion of post-school education as a possibility. But she too, like the others, felt very threatened by this change: "First I went as a part-time student, and I was glad to get asked. It was my self-motivation so if I failed I could do it quietly and slip out the back door. " Georgette also conveys the sense that it is she who is responsible. Interestingly enough, she was also one of the women who was uncertain as to how to self-identify in class terms, explaining that different influences had obtained in her family background. There is also a stronger sense of moving toward, motivated by her role as a parent, and the learning she engaged in, in relation to her son's disability.

An additional account of entering directly is provided by Ethel in Appendix 34a.

3.3.2. 'Direct entry' via Hillcroft

Nancy had become increasingly dissatisfied with her job, feeling that she wanted to try something else: "But I thought I could never go for a degree course straight away. I just didn't have the confidence and I had never written anything." Like with Andrea, the proximity to her home suited her. But when she came for interview, and was given a form to complete - asking, for example, if she had read much - she didn't know where to begin: "But in the end I did it. But I thought they

won't give it to me anyway." But they then invited her back to do a test: " I said, well, after that, they won't want me. Everything I did I thought, No, I'm not the person they're looking for. " But then a week later, she was told she had a place: "I was really pleased because I had read the things they had given out, the prospectus and everything, and I thought, Well I may as well try it."

Such an account provides a vivid contrast to those whose identity was tied up with formal education, and who had a clear moving towards orientation. For Nancy, until she was accepted, what she might study there was not even a consideration.

Victoria heard about Hillcroft through her networks in the peace and women's movement. Since it was particularly through the latter that she had come to discover and trust her own sense of possibility as a learner, she was particularly drawn to Hillcroft because it was a woman's college: "That felt right for me." Again, Victoria, like many other women, speaks in self-referential terms to convey a sense of connectedness with her place of study. Her previous experience of her husband's return to study also left her, "in awe of 18 year olds and I needed to build up on my confidence." Victoria said that she had come with a clear goal, "to get to university. I didn't know if I was capable of that. But I had the energy, the drive."

As may be recalled from Chapter 5, Victoria's discovery of herself as a learner began with the miner's strike, and had been helped also by her husband's experience as a mature student, at which time she developed her awe of 18 year olds. Although she felt lacking in confidence to some extent, as discussed in Section 2, she nonetheless had developed sufficient resilience and a rudder of sorts that had well compensated for her previous experiences of education. She now felt able to 'move towards' university at this stage in her life.

3.4. Reflections on these 3 patterns of re-entry.

The use of cause and effect explanations for why or how adults return to some kind of formal learning context is seen here to be inadequate and overly-simplistic. Instead, for these adults, reality

is comprised of multiple, simultaneously interacting influences, that coalesce at particular points in their lives in particular ways to give rise to the possibility of a return.

Those at home and in dead end jobs are fuelled by an increasing sense of disjunction in their lives. The conditions that give rise to the possibility of a return include insufficient stimulation, little status or affirmation, and, particularly for women, a deteriorating sense of having an identity of their own.

Even among those who had had 'discovery experiences' as discussed in Chapter 5, their accounts suggested no sense of a learner identity in relation to formal education. Thus this choice did not immediately come to mind as an option, despite a growing need for stimulation and a wish to get out of a rut. Their increased confidence, based on compensating alternative experience, seems however to have made them receptive to information that came their way about opportunities for returning: certainly more so than when they had left school. But those who had some kind of discovery experience, where new meanings and possibilities associated with being a learner had emerged, still tended to find it difficult to think beyond gaining access, much less getting some higher qualification. They were more preoccupied with surviving the culture shock of the return, since this created a disjunction in how they saw themselves as learners in relation to formal education, based on prior experience. For too long, they had seen higher education as not for, 'the likes of them.'

Overall, for those who have had little positive experience of learning in formal learning contexts or whose prior experiences at school has been characterised largely by disjunction, there is little scrutiny of the options on offer to them, or active considerations of how and why one course, rather than another, will be of particular benefit and relevance, in both content and process terms. The conditions of these adults' lives may have been ripe for a friend to suggest higher education as an option, or for them to follow up a television programme or an outreach attempt in a library. But the circumstances for many of these adults actual return to learning would better be described as serendipitous. Gaynor captures the

essence of how many of these adults felt about formal education. She says, in reference to a neighbour doing an O.U. degree, "She must be someone 'really clever'... 'not like me'." (VI, 8: 75) This theme of higher education being seen as something 'not for someone like me' pervades many accounts, as illustrated above and in Chapter 5.

In their recollections of why they returned, these adults suggest that they had generalised hopes for personal development, and wider employment choice as a result of doing some kind of course in a formal learning context. But the impetus for their change seemed lodged more in the 'here and now' and the past of their lives, rather than in the future. Whatever form of re-entry is used, they begin to feel able to 'move out' of the sense of disjunction they are feeling in relation to their lives, or their work. Moreover, there is hope that this change will fuel them 'towards' something different. But this 'something' is conveyed more as something which happens to them, rather than something which they felt able to actively pursue, with a clear sense of identity and purpose, or with a sense that they have a right to be in formal education.

As such, many of the above are still prone to being undermined by the judgements of others. Questions of learner identity are still at issue, and possibilities are still being discovered. The scope for being 'buffeted about' remains great.

This is in direct contrast to the professionals who displayed a fourth pattern. They have moved in and out of education most of their lives, making clear choices and decisions, based on a strong sense of learner identity in relation to formal education. It is to their stories to which I turn next.

3.5. The 'professionals': in and out

Only a minority in this study convey a sense of having been proactive in seeking out a return to formal education. They can be referred to as 'the professionals'. These include: Derek, Amy, Jane and Raissa, teachers doing post-graduate degrees; and Pamela, Nina and Sheila, all of whom were managers doing a 8 week professional development

course through their local authority. Derek and Sheila are the only professionals who self-identified as working class, acknowledging, however, that their life style had become more middle class. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Countryshire trio provided an important alternative perspective on expectations and experiences of returning from the vantage point of a course which was substantial, theoretically and practically based, and of the calibre such that it might easily be accredited at higher degree level now by CNAA now under its Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme. (CNAA, 1988) Their vantage point enabled me to explore themes that had arisen in other formal learning and particularly higher education contexts, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

These adults came across to me as having been pre-disposed by their prior experiences of learning, at home and at school, and since initial education, to relate their own sense of learner identity to a formal education assumptive framework. They tended to carefully choose their course, and consider it within the context of an overall career and personal development strategy. Although the stimulus for acting may have been provided by a certain level of dissatisfaction with the circumstances of their lives, and thus some wish to 'move out of' a particular situation, this group conveyed a sense of feeling able to study their options in detail, and to assume that they would achieve, if they chose the 'right course.' 'Right' was determined by their goals and needs.

Like most adults in studies of returning and mature student participation in higher and continuing education, the professionals had a great deal of previous experience with education. (Sheila is an exception in this, although she had a great deal of experience of nonformal employer based education and training which she used for professional advancement.) Each of these 'professionals' had specific interests which they saw as directly related to their choice of course, and based on their preliminary investigations into what the course offered and how it operated, they expected their interests and goals to be met.

Accounts of their different educational choices at different times in their lives peppered their interviews, and thus no one excerpt captures this 'in and out pattern'. I therefore will summarise this in my own words, based on factual information offered across their various individual interviews. For example, Amy had previously done a B.Ed, taught in a comprehensive, and then done an M.Phil followed by a great deal of professional and in-service training. Derek, who was offered secondment for his M.A. course, had upon leaving school, begun a degree in pharmacy at university and experienced a great deal of disjunction. He then switched to education, through which he took a number of professional development courses. Raissa had done a university degree immediately following grammar school, followed by a PGCE, and after a gap of working and raising her children, a specialist diploma. She too had done a number of short courses, before returning to do an M.A.

Taking examples from the Countryshire group, Nina had done a year's nurse's training, and after another gap, a two year professional training. Afterwards she participated in a number of professional development courses. Pamela had done a degree and then after a gap did a professional training course for two years, and various employer-based courses throughout. Sheila, who it may be recalled, was 'fired to achieve' by her experience of disjunction at secondary school, had also done an employment based in-service professional training and as indicated earlier, many short courses. She was also fortunate in being in a work environment which she experienced as a significant influence on her own professional learning and development. For Sheila, unlike the others who could be described as 'professionals', 'learning' implied certain kinds of meaningful feelings, processes, relationships and experiences: not formal education.

The moving towards orientation interweaves with these 'in and out' patterns. (Appendix 35) For example, Amy spent eighteen months deciding on the right course. She consulted extensively with others, considering whether a taught course or a part research course would best suit her needs. Her M.A. course offers her "personal recognition" and "the discipline of a new career."

Derek speaks about how he had been delayed in his plans to do post-graduate study. His motives are career related, but he too seeks stimulation and the opportunity for further professional and personal development. He conveys his clear sense of identity in relation to the formal system and the extent to which his prior experiences lead him to expect that he will continue to experience a sense of integration: "I wanted to get back to an intellectually stimulating environment (...) My capacity for intellectual argument is jaded. I need an injection, especially with my teaching."

Further dimensions to this orientation are illustrated by the stories of those whose prior experiences of education had been less than satisfactory. Jane's prior experiences of education had been characterised by a great deal of stress, and she continues to feel a strong sense of personal failure. It will be recalled from Chapter 5 that her need for affirmation was most meaningful when it came from the formal education system. Jane had done a secretarial course, numerous adult education courses, a B.Ed, and had just begun her M.A. at the time of this study. She chose her course because she regarded it as relevant to both vocational and personal development hopes and aims. Although she was clear that she wanted to get away from teaching, she also wanted the opportunity to prove, "I wasn't a failure again" - something she associated with her B.Ed degree because she had not done as well as she had hoped. Although she sought a career change through the M.A., she placed her intrinsic interest in the subject, above vocational goals. Jane's remains preoccupied with academic success, and still shows evidence of internalising her previous failures, despite her many educational achievements. As will be seen in Section 4 on anticipating, her anxieties and fears remain rooted in her previous experiences of initial education.

The pattern in the above accounts is also evident in the accounts of the 'professionals' whose learning at the time of the interview was in a formal learning context, but outside of higher education. (also, Appendix 35) Nina, Pamela and Sheila, spoke about weighing up choices and options, in relation to their personal and professional needs, interests and aims.

For example, Sheila's experiences of school had been fraught with disjunction. This had generated an anger that fuelled her determination to succeed. She channelled this into her career, and into taking a range of in-service and other professional development courses to further her career progress. These experiences seem to have generated a clear sense of learner identity in relation to particular kinds of formal learning contexts. This course enables her to "do practical things, not just the theory. " She is concerned to stay abreast of developments in her field: "If not, I wasn't going to get anywhere. I would have been stuck. I was realising I had to do something about it. I wanted to achieve again and I wanted to^{do} some training, so it was necessary then." Sheila, like the other professionals, consulted extensively as to which course was most appropriate to her needs and goals, She spoke with the tutor also, to find out how the course was run, and with others who had been on it. Sheila conveys how her learning on courses outside formal education have sufficiently compensated for the damaging effects of her prior experiences, so that she feels sufficiently confident to be proactive in surveying her options, and choosing the one that seems most relevant and appropriate to her as a learner.

Thus, across such accounts where the emphasis is on 'moving towards' , there are clear patterns of 'checking out', based on extensive experience of formal education. They tended to inquire about course process and content, and consider actively how it related to current interests and needs and future hopes and goals. They continued to carry a sense of continuity between their initial (or for Sheila and Jane, their subsequent educational experience) and the role and value of further formal education. There is no sense of higher or continuing professional education "not really being me" or "for the likes of me" as in so many of the previous accounts. Nor do they convey a sense of disjunction between their sense of learner identity, and the idea of being a mature student.

Instead, these 'in and out' learners convey the 'all of a piece' theme that characterised so many middle-class adults' experiences of initial education. In Chapter 4, all but Sheila conveyed how expectations at home and school were that they would and should do well.

In these 'in and out'/'moving towards' stories, a strong sense of confidence is also conveyed. These stories contrast with those of the women who worked mainly inside their homes or those whose previous experience of education has been characterised largely by disjunction. Jane, whose previous experience of initial education was such, suggests dimensions of further complexity. But overall, these adults suggest that they have developed the resilience, through repeated experiences of learning characterised by a sense of integration, to choose the course that 'feels right' for them. Their assumptions about their future directions are largely positive. Their prior experiences of learning within and outside the system, and possibly their social positioning, as middle class adults and/or as professionals, perhaps has conditioned them to experiencing disjunction as peripheral rather than central to their own sense of learner identity and possibility.

3.6. Multiple needs in interaction with particular conditions

Although multiple needs and desires are suggested in many of the accounts above, a few additional examples here can further enhance how various orientations can combine with patterns of return in intricate ways. (Appendix 36)

For example, there are those for whom some kind of vocational outcome, that is qualitatively different from their present situation, is important, and whose movement, like the professionals, can be identified as more 'towards' than 'away from'. Todd had experienced a sense of disjunction throughout his school career. Now a successful singer and musician, on the verge of a major recording contract, he describes why he returned to formal education, after surviving, "fifteen years without further study" and having "never failed at what I did." His aim was to finance his music career with another well paid job. In addition, the damage of his prior experiences at school was conveyed by his wish that, "a larger group of people would accept the way I thought." He too had 'consulted' but in less formalised ways than those suggested by the professionals: "My friend was here and he

was full of praise and I knew him well. The changes in him were good." Finally, the change was convenient.

Patricia, who returned from Israel and whose story of 'discovery' was discussed in Chapter 5, had established an identity as a counsellor, and to some extent a trainer, through her non-formal training and experience. She returned to study with the wish to establish herself as a free-lance consultant. However, in an account written upon her return to formal education, she described her hope to, "challenge and re-examine my present perspective on life (...) although this has no direct context within my work. " She also conveys the meaningfulness of the in-relation theme to her expectations - one that will be seen to be centrally at issue for women in Chapter 7 - since she wants to explore connections between, " how people feel and the environment and social systems in which individuals within society have to live." The influence of her prior learning, including her discovery experiences outside formal education, seem to have lent a distinctive richness to her aspirations and expectations.

Peter's situation once again throws up some interesting questions and complexities. Peter would not refer to himself as a professional, although his life history suggests a lifelong learner, who has been in and out of formal education, but with neither a clear 'moving towards' or 'away from' orientation. When he left school, he engaged in systematic independent study and reading, making extensive use of the library and other people who had the expertise he perceived he needed. Meanwhile, he worked in various jobs. He left his public school as a top student but remained cynical about what further formal education could offer him. When he spoke about his initial return, to university after some time working and studying on his own, he said that he was "suspicious of the motivation of teachers" based on his experiences at his secondary school. He explained how he didn't know, "what to go for at university. I was really torn as to what to study." Peter eventually returned because he became aware of a broad based degree and was assured by a friend that he would find greater stimulation in the environment itself than he could provide for himself.

Peter's disillusionment with higher education was such that he left after the first year, although he returned a year later (to be discussed in Chapter 7) After finishing his degree, he continued to engage in strategically focused independent study and then decided to do a part-time M.A. course. He later chose to abandon this in favour of being a fully involved parent, committed to learning with his son while he was growing up. He moved to a different region of the country, took a part-time job, sharing the parenting with his partner, and eventually analysed the skill shortages in his area. At the time of this writing, he has begun a two year training as a draughtsman, which guarantees him the possibility of being able to move 'in and out' of employment, as he wishes and is required, by the responsibilities of shared parenting.

3.7. Reflections on contrasting patterns and orientations for returning

In most research into adults participating in and returning to higher education vocational motives are cited as foremost. (e.g. Woodley et al, 1988) The majority of adults in such studies are middle class and/or male, which may account to some extent for the differences. By focusing on what it meant to learn and be a learner, inside and outside education, with adults who tend to be under-represented in higher education, I believe I was able to get at some of the complexities associated with adults returning that are not addressed in other studies.

I have suggested that there are broad orientations, that I have described as 'towards' and 'away from or out of'. However, the notion of 'multiple interacting influences' , a central assumption in the paradigm in which this study is rooted, captures for me the situations of these adults prior to their return. The directional nature of the term 'motivation' (such as 'away' or 'towards') describes only one aspect to the complexities of the circumstances surrounding these adults' returns and how they saw themselves as learners in relation to formal learning contexts. Either/or dichotomies (e.g. personal development or career goals) have little

meaning when considered against the complexities of these adults' lived experiences.

4. Anticipating: a collage of word images

However and why the return to a formal learning context (and particularly higher education) was anticipated or came about, nonetheless anxieties and fears were prominent in adults' retrospective accounts. Here I should like to create a collage of word pictures around the theme of 'anticipating' . as a means of setting the scene for Chapter 7.

When we examine the kinds of words used to describe what it was like to anticipate making the change, it is virtually impossible to distinguish differences along lines of, for example, class, gender race or prior learning experience. What may be clear by now is the importance of hearing what these words meant to particular individuals. Each of these statements has been shaped by these adults' prior experiences of learning and being a learner in different contexts. For some, disjunction cuts deep into the cycles of their memories. For others, integration is the dominant trend in their history of learning and being a learner over time, and for a few, central to their idea of themselves as learners. For some, a learner identity that embraces the possibility of formal education is taken for granted; for others, this is anything but the case, and there is a sense of being where one is not meant to be.

Each learner's life provides a unique web of meaning. But there are also patterns that weave across the webs, within the unfolding spiral of these adults' accounts over time. It is in these patterns that the conceptual framework of disjunction and integration is rooted.

These pen pictures are offered here without further interpretation or analysis, to be understood in the context of what has come before:

Jane: "I always feel its difficult to separate out your own experience from knowledge. [...] That's something I'm going to have to work at, really, because I keep relating it to me, and to my own experiences, and because of the fact that it has been nine years since I have had any academic experience. I must come to grips with objectifying these things. Does that make sense?" (II, 8: 06/36)

Amy: "First time, I got on a horse, I felt for the seat strap to hold me in (laughter) I DID THAT TOO! And I was at the bottom of my class, my riding class. It's a high class but I am at the bottom. I haven't got the confidence and I am really very frightened. White with fright. Very nervous. But really, a very nervous rider and that is the only situation where it actually shows now. So there are moments of exhilaration and excitement and you know you can progress, and you know you can do things, and it's similar here. I know I will be heading mid-bottom, but I'm in there fighting. (II, 8: 016/48)

Vera: "You risk a lot, especially if you are married. ..Its a very sobering thought that you might be threatening the whole of your family life just because you are putting your personal development a higher priority. AN EQUAL PRIORITY? Yes, equal, but at times it has to be higher than other things or otherwise you wouldn't get there!...Yeah. I feel very cross with [my husband] , because he had a very privileged education and he went to Cambridge and he has two post graduate degrees [,,,] But he had all the super qualifications. And he put me down severely on 2-3 occasions which he has completely forgotten. But I haven't . (VI, 8: 02/67)

Connie "You can't go back once you start that development. I would only have felt frustrated, resentful. The choices were his, not mine. Grow with me or it will dissolve." (Connie, I, 8: 011/14)

Godfrey: "It's a different experience for Black people. Not individuals who helped you [learn]. That's for white people. But Black people must do it on their own."

Janice: "Got same messages but not so overt. Driving force for me is

to find myself. Led me to push to do something with education. Plus as a woman. I knew I was independent, ambitious, but what did I want to do? Plus find out what I could achieve. Own personal development." (I, 8: 109/27)

Patsy: "I didn't look at it as learning outside. This is just learning, in here. yes, perhaps that is a better way of. What I said about feeling, I think that is important. " (Patsy, member of 'Returning to Learning' course at Hillcroft, V, 8: 5/24)

Todd: "I was afraid of my ability to learn, and 'Will I fit in? Am I too old? Too young? And I was told I was a male chauvinistic pig the first day. " (I, 8: 17/13)

Janice: "I was proving myself from the beginning I could do it. " (Janice, I, 8: 33/3)

Diane: "This piece of paper was supposed to be part of it. Look here, [Diane], you're capable." (Diane, I, 8: 39/26)

Susan: "One friend tried to put me off. She was frightened I would lose my spontaneity and interest. A bit like 'Educating Rita'. (V, 8: 46/9) Two things were on my mind. What I hoped for and what I thought I'd get. But I had a plan. Play the game, get the paper, get a decent job and maybe you won't be as exploited.[...] But what I hoped for..! That I would meet people here like Judy and the others in Brunei." (Susan, V, 8: 26/10)

CHAPTER 7 DOMINANT THEMES AND CONCERNS IN ADULTS' EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into seven sections, each of which relates to a key dimension of learner experience of higher and continuing education (to be referred to as higher education throughout). Together these dimensions of experience interweave with prior experiences and meanings of learning and being a learner to further shape an individual's sense of his or her learner identity and possibility. The sections are as follows:

- First encounters
- Constructive and unconstructive jarrings in the teaching-learning situation
- Issues of power and role
- On knowing and knowledge
- Mediating quality: on dialogue-in-relation
- Changes
- Advice to tutors

Throughout this chapter, as in previous ones, the themes of disjunction and integration, and the shaping of a sense of learner identity and possibility, will be centrally at issue. The cumulative picture of this chapter, building on previous ones in Part II, provides a rich mosaic about adult learner, and particularly non-traditional student, experience.

2. First Encounters

2.1. Making sense of a new world

For the majority of the adults in this study, with the exception (to some extent) of the 'professionals' who had been in and out of education, the decision to return to a formal learning situation could herald a change which in itself was overwhelming. The contrast

between everyday learning, and learning in an academic context, has the potential to be experienced as false and forced, particularly during the first few weeks. For those who enter higher education directly, rather than from some other kind of formal learning context, and whose prior experiences of formal education were characterised by disjunction and their experiences outside education by discovery, the re-encounter with formal education can feel very unsettling indeed.

The abruptness of the first encounter with a new world for which their educational or social background did not prepare them is a common theme. (Appendix 38). For example, Janet, Vera and Andrea, all of whom entered at the same time, spoke in their group interview about their first few weeks at Hillcroft. Janet said, "I felt terrified!", how, "I just wanted to go home!", "It was just all too much." Andrea said that the culture shock for her was mediated by having been on a 'Returning to Learning Course' , but nonetheless, it felt, like a "big step. It was entry into a different world." Vera, who had done an O level as described in Chapter 6, emphasised a point also made by the others: that there was too much emphasis on, "what do you want to do when you leave?" They referred to the tutors' speaking about 'packages' in the first week, and Vera describes her vision of:

Field record:"...twenty women all sitting at this table with brown paper and string deciding how we were going to wrap our packages. (...)The fact that people even got here was a huge step for many women (...) and they were being bombarded with the fact that these choices were going to affect the rest of their lives."

They all refer to the physical fatigue, and the dramatic change in pattern and pacing of their lives. Vera speaks about cleaning the house throughout the school holidays and then suddenly being plunged into the "mental anguish" of all this decision making. Janet had, "work problems on Friday and then on Monday you suddenly change the whole of your life. It is turned upside down and it is absolutely shattering. It changes the whole temperature of your life."

Gaynor illustrates how an all too precarious sense of self esteem, can render these adults far more vulnerable to remarks which might have

easily bounced off more resilient adults. She describes how she felt herself, "sinking under a mass of information" in the middle of which, her tutor assumed prior knowledge: "Of course you would all recognise a Michelangelo." Gaynor describes her shock at this expectation, finding this a "bit disheartening" and quite "daunting to have that sort of remark made." In Gaynor's account of her first encounter with the institution, the theme of 'making sense' of a new world is vivid.

These women represent students whose prior experiences of formal learning were largely characterised by disjunction and whose subsequent experiences by some sense of 'identitylessness'. They demonstrate the extent to which they required opportunities to talk and reflect upon the impact of the transition, to be supported in making sense of it, and be helped to manage the disjunction between the pacing and expectations in their lives as homemakers^{and} their new lives as students within the institution. They also further illustrate themes explored in Chapter 6, including how tutors' emphasis on 'the future', as opposed to the 'here and now' felt premature. They were still experiencing a kind of culture shock about having gained access in the first place. Survival in the new environment was their predominant concern.

2.2. A sense of integration upon entry

This theme is suggested in two types of accounts (Appendix 39) The first of these comes from those who had moved in and out of formal contexts throughout their lifetimes. They seem to have managed the transition back to formal education by drawing upon many years of 'learning how to learn'. They seem more able to use their inner resources developed in the course of managing different kinds of learning experiences in a range of contexts: in formal education and, for a number, continuing professional development courses. The transitions of the 'professionals', such as Raissa, Amy, Derek, Peter and Jane, to the academic formal learning context, and Pam, Nina and Sheila to their continuing education course, after at least 5 years away, suggest more of that 'feeling all of a piece' theme first introduced in Chapter 4. Even those who had experienced a great deal of disjunction during their school years, Sheila and Jane in

particular, built up a certain amount of resilience as a result of their 'in and out' educational pattern identified in Chapter 6: the women perhaps less so than Derek; the two working class people perhaps less so than the others.

For example, Sheila returned to study on a substantial course programme outside a higher education institution. She describes what she has learned from her prior experience - within and outside the education system - about her needs if she is to feel able and willing to learn in a particular environment. She mentioned, "time to talk (...) to one another, about different issues, about how you feel" and "not feeling criticised for having your own feeling really. That's your opinion." She speaks about the need for tutors to respect the kinds of situations in which, "people feel able to talk and in what situations they don't. Respecting that." Sheila suggests ways in which, still for her, the climate for learning remains a critical factor in compensating for her prior experiences of disjunction. In the second excerpt, , Sheila speaks about how she had exercised a great deal of choice and scrutiny, before deciding upon this substantial programme of structured learning.

The second group of accounts in which a sense of integration was suggested upon arrival came from women at Hillcroft. Sally and Victoria provide two examples. Sally felt this sense of 'integration' fairly immediately: "Everything was as expected. (...)for years, I have not been so happy. (...)For me, it was learning without the nasty bits." Sally's description of her arrival at Hillcroft conveys a sense of connectedness between her experience of the new environment with her discoveries about herself as a learner outside the formal system. She also conveys how she experienced a kind of 'immediate' sense of compensation for the disjunction that characterised her prior education, and her learning in relation to her husband.

Victoria also illustrates the sense of continuity that many Hillcroft women experienced in relation to prior experiences of themselves as women in other kinds of learning situations. She feels that her experience of learning and being a learner at Hillcroft, as compared

with her participation in her women's groups (as discussed in Chapter 5) was the, "same really." Whereas in both groups arguments and differences figured, Victoria still found that, " We are very supportive of each other and understanding of each other." In contrast to Vera, Janet and Andrea, Victoria felt there was a distinct lack of pressure to push on to other academic work:

Field record:"...it's there if you want it. (...)But also [you can say] it's a good thing in itself and don't want to do any more. (...)Just to have done the course. The experience of it."

Victoria's experience of her first encounter with Hillcroft thus contributed to the sense of enhanced integration she began to feel in her women's group, and continued to repair the damage she experienced during initial education.

2.3. Transitions across different formal learning contexts: second first encounters

By following up women in the study who moved from Hillcroft to another academic environment, at university or polytechnic, I was able to focus on how adults experienced contrasting situations, and the influences of their prior learning from a different angle. (Appendix 40) For example, Sally's account of her arrival at Hillcroft contrasts sharply with our first follow up interview after she had been at university for a year. Despite the extent to which her experience at Hillcroft compensated for her earlier experiences of disjunction within the formal system, her transition to university further highlights how the first few weeks, term and year can be critical. Sally also found the contrast between other students' attitudes to their experience and her own quite unsettling: "obsessed with getting qualifications and they have all been struck with such terror and they have been unemployed (...)obsessed with getting the best degree. " Sally confessed that she did not really understand what a PhD was, "but quite frankly I'm not really concerned. I'd only just gotten my foot inside the door for a degree and they all seem to be obsessed with getting on."

She read the transcript of her expectations during the previous year and commented, for example:

Field record: "'Hope it will be challenging.' I haven't really found it to that extent. Well it has in a way in terms of coping but not so much in learning.. 'Deep suspicion it won't be as open minded.' Absolutely true! Every bit of that is true! "I expect to become disillusioned about [my subject area] in lots of ways.' Yes I have but (...)I think it (...)has great potential."

She speaks about the unanticipated absence of contact with, for example, foreign students, an aspect of learning at work that she had previously associated with discovery. She also speaks about the absence of informal dialogue, something that was central to her discovery of herself as a learner: at work, in the happier phases of her marriage, work and at Hillcroft.

Sally's resilience in managing her sense of disjunction in the new situation - though highly tenuous at times - seems largely to derive from the wellspring of confidence that she developed at Hillcroft. Her account also gives some indication of how the research interviews themselves seem to have provided a means whereby she could identify and begin to manage the disjunction she was experiencing. For example she sat down to write me about what she was experiencing straight away upon arrival at university.

Connie illustrates the impact of a transition from one formal learning context where a sense of integration has predominated to another where this is not the case. Throughout the data, people spoke about how precarious their confidence was, despite being built up in a previous environment, and how dependent they still were upon the quality of relationships to retain that confidence in a new learning situation. When the nature of the support and relationships across two learning contexts is experienced as qualitatively different, and of a lesser quality than before, an even stronger sense of disjunction can arise. The following short extract from Connie's account encapsulates this sense of culture shock that many spoke about when moving between contrasting learning environments:

Field record: "TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE TRANSITION FROM FE TO HE. Not sure when I noticed. I never thought about what to expect. Just saw it as a challenge. I expected to come out with something. I didn't know what. Plus the structure of the building affects you. Lecture halls, benches, teachers rather than FE tutors who were part of the group rather than a separate entity with all the knowledge. They don't cater for mature students over 30." (I, 8: 035/21)

Karen had two prior experiences of formal learning situations - with her A level tutor and at Hillcroft. These had considerably boosted her confidence in her own capability. She moved onto university to do a degree in her favourite subject area, and onto a programme which she carefully chose for its emphasis on small group teaching. Karen experienced acute feelings of isolation, damage to her sense of learner identity, and a lowering of confidence.

Field record: At university (...) you don't discuss comments. At Hillcroft you did. Talking with others generally about the subject, and difficulties they have. Now [at university] people don't admit difficulties. SW WHICH MUST ENHANCE YOUR FEELING OF, 'IT MUST BE ME' K: does come out sometimes, slip out the odd phrase. But then, they go quiet. But I keep hoping they'll say something that will trigger me." YOU SPEAK A LOT ABOUT FEELING VALUED. DO YOU FEEL THAT THERE? No, perhaps that's, why no 'ticks' [referring to lack of feedback on essays] is a problem. I'm a big girl. I shouldn't need it. But I do. And when I do a presentation, I keep asking, was it all right? And they look amazed and say, yes. BUT LOCUS FOR JUDGING IS 'OUT THERE', NOT IN YOU...? Yes. ALWAYS LIKE THAT. LIKE AT HILLCROFT. DID YOU HAVE A MORE INTERNAL WAY OF JUDGING? Yes I didn't feel I needed all these pats on the head. There it was like a support group. I felt terrible the first year [at university], like I'd lost this sort of network. I still feel this rush of deja vu. When I see [Sally] and she talks about so and so, you get this rush. A network thing. Women supporting women. Which I miss terribly there.(...)None of the seminars I'm in, I mean, they don't put you down. They turn your comments around. But they're nice about it." (Follow up interview, 14/3/88)

Karen's difficulties with the overall culture and style of teaching and learning at university, and with particular tutors manifested themselves in a serious writing block that made her three years fraught with continual struggle and anxiety.

A more positive example is offered by Janet, in her account of moving from Hillcroft to a small department in a university. Relationships play a critical role in supporting such a transition, as will be shown throughout this chapter: "I kept thinking, this is what it feels like to learn. There was also much the same stimulation, people with ideas. Being triggered. This should be true of any learning." She also conveys how her own increased resilience has enabled her "playing the game" when necessary. She also stresses the importance of letting others know "who you are because otherwise they forget and you become a non-person." In such words, Janet captures the influences of prior learning on how she makes sense of this new learning situation. She did not find satisfaction in 'what it was like to learn at school' As a housewife, with occasional low paid jobs, she had felt like a 'non-person'. At Hillcroft, she learned how to form relationships with tutors as equals. This account contrasts sharply with her initial experience of disjunction when she moved into the entirely unfamiliar world of higher education, as described previously. Her experience of Hillcroft, however, contributed gradually to a sense of integration and greater confidence as a learner, which is becoming more firmly lodged within her.

2.4. Prior learning and the experience or anticipation of disjunction upon arrival

For those whose prior learning experiences had been characterised largely by disjunction, stories about their initial return suggested that they assumed that disjunction was integral to the experience of learning generally within formal learning environments. (Appendix 41) Their own doubt, borne out of prior experience, that it could possibly be different seems to operate as a kind of defensive strategy for managing anticipated disjunction. Susan and Jane came from very different family backgrounds in terms of support for their efforts as students, and in terms of social class. They both, however,

experienced a sense of disjunction throughout their early school years, for different reasons. Susan describes her arrival in the new formal learning context in the following terms: "When I first came here I was like a battering ram. I assumed it was not to be enjoyed." She describes how she:

Field record: "gradually started relaxing more and enjoying it (not all of it , mind you) (laughter) And there was still the same business as at school: the teachers I get on with, great. They make me think maybe learning can be the way I always thought it should be [in school]."

Susan indicates the extent to which she still feels caught by the disjunction she learned to manage during most of her life as a learner: "But still this thing that outside, I enjoy learning and inside, you play the game." As such, she was reluctant to take on the subject she loved most: history.

As with Sally, Susan's account from when she was at Hillcroft contrasts with her description of her arrival at university. Susan seemed almost to chastise herself for having entered university with high expectations:

Field record: "I was very enthusiastic when I got there. (...)that was part of the problem. (...)my expectations were too high (...) and about half way through the first term I was just, became very disillusioned. "

It was as if she 'should have known better', based on her prior experience. But her experience at Hillcroft had been that learning within formal education need not be solely characterised by disjunction. This threw up all sorts of dilemmas and contradictions for her.

The significant impact of prior learning on the self-esteem of many of these adults and their initial encounters with higher education is also illustrated in Jane's story about starting on her M.A. course at London University. Despite the mediating influences of subsequent

learning contexts, and her professional experience, she describes how she still carries with her the damage from her initial education. In Chapter 4, Jane spoke about her experience with maths, and her memory of her fear, due to being slapped on the legs or publicly humiliated when she did badly. Again at university, "I am frightened to death of that [maths] (...) You would think that at my age I would have come to grips with it really." She acknowledged how the feelings of humiliation and pain can remain strong. She describes how she feels more , "independent of the influence of teachers" but she still judges her, "performance by the performance of others around me." In this sense, Jane further illustrates how her learner identity is still tied up with formal education. Jane's account also illustrates how aspects of learning, recalled to be at issue during initial education can be quickly re-surfaced in the new environment: in particular, the influence of others on one's self esteem and sense of possibility as a learner.

Georgette also suggests her vulnerability, due to the effect of previous experiences characterised by disjunctions on her self-esteem as a learner: at home and outside formal education. The former included a damaging experience with her father who until she was 10, had actively served as her mentor and primary source for her sense of identity and possibility as a learner. Georgette's sense of identitylessness outside formal education was described in Chapter 5, where she spoke about feeling like her life was a "great hole" (9:282/21) She describes how during the first year, she kept wanting to, "drop out." She fantasised that others were "making sense of it. Kept saying they were!" She eventually realised that others were also struggling, and if she worked hard she could do it: "But learning has always been stressful for me. It is low self esteem that makes it difficult for me. Because I have always done well at the time." In other words, Georgette continues to experience a sense of disjunction

n terms of her own sense of learner identity and possibility, and the learning process, despite evidence of her capabilities.

Further examples of how prior experiences of disjunction as a learner at school can continue to exert an influence, and create an expectation of further disjunction, are by provided by Laurence and Nicole in Appendix 41.

3. Constructive and unconstructive jarrings in the teaching-learning situation

3.1. Development out of disjunction

Some students felt a sense of being at one with their learning environment almost from the moment of arrival. Others spoke about how their first encounter either gave rise to a sense of immediate disjunction or readiness for disjunction, due to prior lifelong learning experiences. A sense of disjunction, however, as indicated in Chapter 5, need not only be experienced as something negative or as something that creates a sense of unconstructive fragmentation, but rather as the beginning of a constructive developmental process under certain kinds of conditions. Disjunction as something integral to change itself was often described by adults who, in a particular learning context, felt valued for who they were as people, as well as for their prior experience, and who were experiencing learning as a process of involvement and interrelating. In other words, conditions conducive to integration were present, thereby facilitating risk taking. (Appendix 42)

This theme is suggested by Susan in the previous section where she described the extent to which the new learning situation was challenging the sense of learner identity and possibility that she had developed at school, and her view of education, as developed through the years. She was prepared to resist, but was having to re-structure the way she saw herself in-relation-to education. This set up a new kind of disjunction with which she had to deal. Similarly, Rita and Penny convey their struggle to repair their damaged self-esteem and confidence in a new learning context experienced as conducive to integration. They suggest a 'one step forward, two step back' pattern, and the extent to which they are gradually overcoming the

negative impact of prior learning experiences. It may be recalled from previous chapters that these women had left school with no sense of learner identity and possibility, and experienced a gradual loss of confidence and identity as a result of subsequent experiences at home.

Rita communicates the extent to which her previous experience of formal education, had contributed to a feeling that she was unable to be bright and a person. As a working class girl at school, she learned to associate any demonstration of her intellectual ability with rejection by boys and by friends - experiences that created a deep sense of disjunction, in her own sense of learner identity and possibility. (V,7: 110 , 16). Whereas after being on Hillcroft's 'Return to Learning' course, during which we had our first interview, and experiencing her first year on the Diploma, she describes her excitement about being able to be bright and still be seen as, "o.k." by others: "being bright doesn't make it different.(...) I am bright and still me!"

Penny speaks about how Hillcroft gave her the opportunity to receive support and affirmation from other women and to discover her own sense of potential. A break from men enables her and others to learn that they weren't "dolally". She talks about how being with other women can "build up part of you and then you can tackle whatever it is needs doing and that is good."

An additional account is provided in Appendix 42 by Vera who speaks about, "walking a tightrope. Like appearing to be confident, as I do sometimes, but feeling like jelly inside." These women are being jarred gently but firmly by their learning situation into overcoming the negative impact of alternative kinds of learning experiences and into a re-structuring of their own sense of learner identity and possibility. But there was a commonality in their description of the kinds of learning conditions, processes and relationships that made them feel 'at one', with themselves and in relation to others. In such environments, they felt able to risk finding the courage to speak, to feel value in who they were and in their prior experience, and to become gradually more confident. These themes will continue to be elaborated throughout this chapter.

These accounts need also to be considered within the context of relationships with partners, parents and prior teachers. These figures had either not encouraged or had actively discouraged learning and development of the kind that contributed to a sense of integration in these women. The impact of these prior experiences on these women's sense of identity as a learner, on their still vulnerable rudders, can be quickly re-activated- a theme which will be continue to be developed from other angles in this chapter.

Voice 2: Throughout the course of this study, a continual confrontation with women like, for example, Sheila, Susan, Sally and Victoria (cited in Section 2.) and Penny, Vera and Rita, and other women's stories forced me to examine the themes about which they so often spoke in my own life, as a woman and as a learner. For instance, I began to wonder why I had so readily given up my career path and PhD opportunity to look after my mother in England? I began to examine other experiences in my childhood from a gender perspective, reflecting on my own fragile confidence and my own voicelessness, as expressed through a writing block, like Karen, for many years , and why that was so. At one of the Bath conferences, I had the opportunity to explore this through a workshop on 'multiple voices' within us when we are writing. Once again, I was forced to confront issues of male power in my childhood and in my own experiencing as an adult. For example, Vera's comment about 'invisibility': I began to think about how many times in male forums I had felt invisible. Making comments and receiving no encouragement or support, or indeed recognition, only to hear a man make the same point later and receive sole credit for introducing it. I thought about things which Karen said about feeling as if she could not possibly speak authoritatively, in her subject area. As I was to learn later from the study of Belenky, Clinchy, McVicar and Tarule (1986) this feeling is common in women, who have learned that only males can be 'the authorities' and who therefore eventually become silent. I reflected on the influence of changing cultures on my own confidence and how positive feedback and encouragement in this culture were seldom forthcoming, lest it give rise to arrogance. (As Raissa said, my mother assumed you knew what your talents were. To acknowledge them might give you a big head) However, I began to observe the ways in which men informally mentored other men: advising, chiding, guiding. I began to listen to such conversations in pubs, restaurants, and wondered how, on the contrary, women seemed to receive mostly criticism rather than opportunities to learn from their mistakes. Like Darcy, in Chapter 5, any mentoring often had sexual overtones.

I began to read more about women in management (e.g. Marshall, 1986) I came to understand that many things I had begun to internalise as my failing were also commonly mentioned by other women, across a whole range of situations. I began to understand how these had contributed to my voicelessness and vulnerability in certain situations. A television programme at this time, involving Dr. Estelle Phillips from Birkbeck College, demonstrated the totally

different approaches that women managers adopted, as compared to men, when faced with the same situation. As such, certain aspects of myself and my own style in organisations began to feel more validated.

At this time, I was also trying to cope with a situation in which women and men were trying to work together as equals. I began to see subtle patterns that can operate to make us as women feel powerless and indeed voiceless. I was also working with groups on issues of equal opportunities, with particular reference to racism. For the first time, I began to think about these things not as issues or causes, but things that centrally concerned me as a person. I gradually had to find ways of peeling back some of my own onion skins, while simultaneously trying to make sense of wider social patternings that I had not personally examined in relation to myself as a woman. A painful struggle indeed. I began to observe my own reactions and other situations involving men and women, from new perspectives. I began to read other feminist literature, and found that the theme of voice, and its relation to women's invisibility and male power, recurred again and again. These were not things about which I had ever thought personally or politically in quite this way. To me, equal opportunities as far as women were concerned had meant dealing with harassment, unequal pay, male attitudes, sexist language and behaviour, and structural barriers. I was now beginning to acknowledge more complex and subtle patternings that can silence. I came to appreciate the role that women's groups can play in building confidence in one's own capability and sought out women's networks within which to make sense of these things. I began to question the ways in which I had previously 'read' my own prior experience, and had to re-think it from new angles, and had to peel back even more layers. As I became aware of my own voicelessness in particular group situations and was able to reflect on these things with other women, I gradually took more risks. I found my own mentors, and together we made contracts to give each other feedback, after, for example, speaking at a large conference. All these learning journeys led to my having to confront my own writing block, and to discover the roots of this in my own life story.

As I became more attuned to these things in myself and in my own interactions with others, men and women, I became better attuned to nuances in the interviews, which I would pick up and check out. In the beginning of the study, I believe I had heard through layers of tacit knowledge and my intuitive responsiveness enabled women to open up to me in particular ways. But in the latter stages of the research, I had binocular vision (Bateson, 1978) and was able to hear certain themes not just intuitively and experientially but also conceptually. My sense of objective subjectivity became more acute. This in turn I believe enhanced the quality of my interaction with the participants, and in turn, the quality of the material that emerged from the interviews. For example, Sally spoke about how at university she was beginning to see herself as 'over sensitive'. She expressed a sense of guilt about feeling as she did about that environment, especially as a working class woman who had 'made it' to higher education. I asked her where the word 'oversensitive' had come from, since this jarred with my previous experience of her at Hillcroft. She began to untangle some of what she was experiencing

in the largely male environment of her university, where she felt unable to make connections and experience herself in relation to others as she had at Hillcroft. (note: this will be introduced through the field record in this chapter)

These cycles of my own learning forced me to address yet again issues of epistemology and methodology. I was coming to know the real challenges and responsibilities entailed in working in a different paradigm. I began to confront the wider meanings of things that had been discussed at Bath in ways that I would never have anticipated when I chose to undertake a qualitative study. I was beginning to understand in a far more complex way than before the subtle ways in which knowledge is not just 'out there', but it is also 'in here'. (Reason and Marshall, 1987) The reflexivity, supervision, and learning demanded of this disciplined inquiry made me as much the subject of research as the adults whose stories I relate here. I began to realise how easily I might have designed a study merely to test and affirm Knowles' andragogical framework at the expense of such richness and so much learning, however much it was laced with some difficult learning on my part. Although at times this 'making sense' process felt totally disempowering, and during these times this was not easy for others around me, ultimately I began to recognise it as empowering, for me and for others. As such, I began to take more responsibility. I was also well rewarded, as shall be shown in cycle 8, for my own greater clarity about issues to do with voice enabled other women whom I followed up also better able to make sense of what they were experiencing. In turn, they could take responsibility for some of the disjunction they were experiencing, but could attribute other aspects to their interaction with a particular learning context.

3.2. Jarrings towards (more) disjunction in formal education

3.2.1. Conflicting meanings for learning

This theme is one of the most powerful and amply documented in these adults' stories of learning within certain formal learning contexts and particularly academic ones, and it interweaves with many other sources of disjunction explored subsequently in this chapter. It is however virtually absent in accounts related to the experience of learning and being a learner at Hillcroft or on the Countryshire course.

For example, a number spoke about how, once they made the adjustment to the new setting, their expectations of learning and being a learner in that environment came to jar more and more with their actual experience. Diane, George, Darcy and Connie, speaking from their experiences of three different departments at Cityside,

describe their own experience of such jarrings, and how they could give rise to their sense of disjunction as a learner. (Appendix 43a)

For example, Diane says how, "I really began to question what is the purpose of all this." She speaks about how her eagerness to learn often felt 'squashed'. She expresses her bafflement about how lecturers, in her experience, tend to understand questions as "criticism. But all I was saying was, "I don't understand this. Help me. Let me hook in." She feels a sense of disjunction between the meanings and expectations for learning generated by learning on her training course and in her women's group, and how she experiences learning on her course.

Darcy talks about how her own expectations and meanings of learning were fundamentally at odds with how she was experiencing learning at Cityside. For her teaching and learning, words she used in the context of discovery outside formal education, were "certainly not what is going on here." She too has learned, through experience, that learning, "equals excitement, curiosity. Even with mundane things. Even these can be stimulating to learn by looking at what is NOT obvious. Even they can involve you." She expresses concern at the lack of involvement and stimulation, and indeed fun. She also speaks at length about a particular tutor and her frustration with his public stance in his role as tutor, and his stance as a person and academic working in that discipline. She conveys vividly the extent to which she often felt she was speaking a different language that could not be heard in that environment, and the sense that her own search for meaningfulness in that environment was in vain: "Once I had an argument with him and I started crying Because he just couldn't see what I was saying. It is so sad." Her own discovery of herself as a learner, on the other hand, (as described in Chapter 5) had been characterised by challenge and involvement, and a strong sense of learner identity and possibility. She felt that this was being put at risk, the longer she stayed in this environment. She conveyed to me that this was perhaps too precious to her to throw it away for a qualification. (Two additional accounts from George, a student seen in a group interview at Cityside, and Connie are provided in Appendix 43)

Each of these students' implicit meanings and expectations can be seen to have been jarred considerably with their actual experience. Subject expertise and enthusiasm for a subject area (often cited characteristics of 'good teachers') are only several factors that are issue for these learners. For example, Darcy is fundamentally concerned with integrity, and the fact that her lecturers seemed to find it difficult to be honest with students about the different views operating in her subject area, or to be concerned with what she considers to be 'real issues'. She found the contradiction between her tutor's 'official stance' and his personal stance (Salmon, 1989) particularly stressful. Her experience of this contradiction contributed to a strong sense of disjunction that she found difficult to accept and to manage, as did others who had been fortunate enough to experience compensating influences that had provided alternative meanings for learning than those which they had experienced at school.

3.2.2. Conflicting meanings for standards and quality

Another kind of general 'jarring' that can contribute to resistance and disjunction related to expectations of quality and standards. (Appendix 43b)

Janice, Godfrey and Bill talk about how they had envisaged higher education as a place where they might be stretched progressively more each year. They too had questions of quality and standards in the foreground of their concerns. Bill speaks about his, "disillusionment." All three describe how their work rates went down. Strategic exam passing was the message they received. Godfrey puts it quite strongly: "Maybe you realise they've already decided what you're going to get. Why work to that standard?" This statement will become clearer in subsequent sections of this Chapter, when all three of these students speak about the low expectations that Black students experienced generally from their lecturers.

Ethel put it bluntly, "I came in as a cynic and I am going out even more so. It's all about knowledge for knowledge's sake. Why stuff it into you when you can look it up in a book." Ethel speaks cynically about the emphasis on learning to pass exams rather than learning in

ways that promoted involvement and development." She describes casualties of the system, asserting, "Not me mate!" Her research, in her final year project, was her saving grace.

Fran and Georgette describe the ebbs and flows of their engagements with the formal learning context over three years. They share their frustration about their enthusiasm not being responded to: "the sort of feedback you got all the way through if you tried to learn." Georgette talks about how she slipped into passivity, as a way of managing the disjunction between her expectations and experience: "And I stopped asking questions in lectures (...)I limited my aims right down." She also suggests, from the perspective of her final year of her course, about how she began to see this experience, "as a starting point for my own learning." In this, she suggests how she has moved from feeling without learner identity and possibility at school and outside education, to feeling more like a 'lifelong learner', as described in Chapter 5.

3.2.3. The decision to leave

It might be argued that those students, who had never expected to enter higher education, and whose social and educational backgrounds had offered little preparation for this experience, had unrealistic expectations (a fantasy relationship?), and that this was the source of their disjunction. But Peter's account raises other kinds of questions.

Peter, it may be recalled, came from a strong academic, and fairly privileged social, background, and he experienced few disjunctions between his experience of learning at home and learning at school. His parents had expected him to pursue academic goals, and thus found it difficult when he chose to go to work instead.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Peter was clearly a highly self-directed lifelong learner. Once at work, he studied philosophy, politics, psychology and other subjects to which this reading led. In previous accounts, Peter has been seen to convey a strong sense of integration as a learner, that was not dependent upon the approval of

'experts' or public validation for his learning efforts. His sense of learner identity and possibility seems to be lodged within himself.

After leaving school, however, and choosing not to go on to university, he was eventually persuaded by a friend to consider higher education. Peter believed himself to have quite realistic expectations about formal education, knowing the influence of examinations upon the experience of learning. (In Chapter 4 and 5, he describes how he became cynical about formal education in the fifth and sixth form.) He nonetheless expected higher education to offer him the opportunity to engage in critical analysis and debate with other students, to be stretched intellectually, and to benefit from structure and tutor guidance.

Peter also experienced a strong sense of disjunction between what he considered to be realistic expectations and what he actually encountered as an undergraduate. For example, Peter, discusses how his own meanings for standards and quality when he first began as an undergraduate student conflicted with how he experienced his university degree course:

Field record: "The whole thing was geared to certain standards, certain expectations, and you weren't really supposed to rock the boat because there wasn't time to talk. (...) It was almost as if the standards had come down and down and down to meet the behaviour of the students."

Peter felt "appalled at how badly the system worked." He felt that his first year was one where, "we learnt very very little which counted for nothing (...) and in which you got no personal tuition because they weren't interested in the first years." He felt stunned by the fact that, "The lecturers just were not interested and I hadn't expected that." His image of learning at university was shattered to a considerable extent by these first experiences, with specific consequences, as I shall discuss shortly.

Field record:"... and it had really been a nasty shock and I didn't want anything to do with it and at the end of the year I [told my tutor] that I don't want to go on. (...) And the exam paper came along and there wasn't a single question (...) that dependent upon you having read and digested a passage of a book. (...) Just like at school, like if you had done your homework, you would pass this exam (...) There was no general demand to see any sort of thoughts, insights, ability or anything."

Peter's clear sense of his own identity and worth as a learner seems to have enabled him not to internalise what was happening as his problem, but rather he made the choice to leave, to reject what was on offer. His account provides what I believe is an important counterpoint against which to consider the experiences of adults from different social and prior educational backgrounds, who largely experienced disjunction during their formal education and who have little sense of integration and self-esteem when they enter such formal learning contexts.

For Peter, his experience of differences, of power and role disjunction is not centrally at issue in the way it is for the others - the theme of the next section. Nor, like Darcy, had he experienced considerable disjunction at school, with no compensating buffer zone at home. Discovery for Peter outside formal education was real, but it had different meanings from those of Darcy, who experienced for the first time a sense of learner identity and possibility.

Sadly, Darcy, although identified to me by a Principal Lecturer as one of the brightest students on the course chose to leave her course at the end of her second year, during which I interviewed her. I learned this several years later. Ironically, in Section 6, Darcy will be seen to have played a critical role in enabling Diane to manage the despair arising from her sense of disjunction.

3.3. Reflections

In many of these accounts, there is a strong sense of disjunction being experienced that seems to arise more from an absence of

something which they needed as learners, in order to feel a sense of integration. In contrast, those who experienced jarrings as a constructive spur towards their own further development convey a sense of something being present that helps them feel willing and able to learn. The absence of this 'something', often unarticulated but deeply felt, jarred with implicit meanings and expectations associated with learning and being a learner in a particular environment. These issues will be explored in greater depth and complexity in the remainder of Part II.

4. Issues of power and role.

4.1. A complex social arena

For Cityside students and Hillcroft students who moved onto traditional higher education courses, there were evident preoccupations with the impact of differences, power relations and role disjunction as they explored what it meant to learn and be a learner in a particular learning context. The ways in which they interpreted these derived from their experience of the wider social context and their prior formal education. These preoccupations were not evident in the accounts from Hillcroft, London University, or Countryshire. In other words, there were distinct patterns in the ways these themes were present or absent across the eight research cycles.

All adults in the study were learning and experiencing being a learner within a complex micro and macro social arena. However, there seemed to be multiple influences that could mediate whether the experiences of a particular formal learning context gave rise to disjunction in relation to being, for example, older, Black or white, men or women, working or middle class. These mediating influences included the ethos and pedagogy of the institution, department and/or course, relationships with peers and tutors, and the influence of prior experiences of learning.

In the sections below, I weave some of the strands together that convey the impact of differences, power relations and role disjunction on the experience of learning in a particular situation, and illustrate some specific ways in which they can be compounded or mediated by other influences. I organise the accounts and discussion in relation to particular dimensions of difference that were at issue in the accounts. I also try to relate the complex ways these can combine. No one sub-section can therefore be read as a discrete entity. Moreover, these strands need to be understood in the context of the overall experience of being a learner in a particular learning context.

4.2. Age

Disjunction in relation to being an older student amongst younger ones was a prevalent concern in the accounts associated with particular research cycles. (Appendix 44a) Janet and Susan moved from one learning environment where there were only mature students, to another where they were the exception. Janet speaks about being just a "token", and how difficult it is for mature students to "let their hair down" amongst 18 year olds. She experienced the younger students as naive, and afraid of appearing "stupid". She felt that this caused the tutor not to bother to encourage dialogue. But she also feels, "much brighter, which is good."

Susan is also in a minority. Like Janet, she finds the passivity frustrating and "strange" and "unnerving" and sympathises with the tutors who have to struggle to break through the barriers. Hillcroft women in particular were shocked by the contrast that such experiences afforded in relation to their prior experiences. Integration in their previous environment was rooted in active dialogue and the exchange and challenging of experiences.

4.3. Age and gender

Vera and Connie speak about the difficulties they experienced in knowing what role to adopt as an older woman in relation to younger students. (Appendix 44b) Vera, like the others, finds herself and the

tutor struggling with knowing what approach to take to enable the younger students to take more responsibility, and become more active as learners. On the one hand, she is struggling with her role, as a woman and as a mature student in groups:

Field record: "It is hard not to become a mother, a teacher. Plus they are my colleagues. I keep thinking about what do they want. Should you worry about this? (...) It is not easy if you have a lot to say and you see them struggling."

On the other, she is also struggling with her role as a woman in relation to the power of male tutors in one-to-one tutorials:

Field record: "Does he like me? I get a bit churned up. Of course, he doesn't have to like me. Just has to mark my work. But one lecturer, he likes to hear problems and play a fatherly role. I don't want to be in that position of him feeling powerful."

Vera describes how a male friend of hers, a psychiatrist, helped her to make sense of what she was experiencing after becoming a mature student at Hillcroft: "You're not only someone's mother, but you're somebody's friend, and those friends feel they have a claim on your time. " Vera talks about her husband's jealousy when friends come over, and he thinks,

Field record: "... he has got Sunday afternoon and me together.(...) The whole conflicts with family causes problem with your studying. Harder to cut yourself off. I think men find it easier to disassociate their responsibilities. (...) But women have to work harder. At putting your personal problems out of your mind. I think women (...) like mutual support. I think men are afraid of mutual support and I think they like it if they can get it but they don't know how to get it from each other and are more afraid of unburdening themselves."

In this, the 'in-relation' theme that runs across women's accounts is clearly highlighted. The role disjunction that Vera is experiencing

stems from her sense of responsibility and feelings in relation to, her family, other students, and her friends.

A similar theme is evident in Connie's account. She too found the absence of dialogue and joint exploration of ideas, amongst people with different life experiences, difficult to manage. But her experience and management of the contrasts between her degree course and her FE experience are, like Vera, compounded by the power of tutors, "who feel they are gods with all the knowledge." In addition, she is managing her role, as a mother and partner, and as a student. She herself speaks about feeling "whole" and "integrated in her views and feelings at home" in contrast to the "split" she feels in relation to being a student. She finds it, "easier to relate to women. With men, they become the teacher. They have never experienced what we have." She describes the anger and frustration she can feel in learning groups, demonstrating also her increased confidence in choosing if and how to deal with "tutors' bear biting again".

Being a learner 'out there' and 'in here' created a particular kind of role disjunction for many women in the study. Carrying primary responsibility for parenting, while in the student role, can create a sense of feeling at odds with oneself. This theme was especially strong in the accounts of women with school age children.

Janice talks about "leading two lives", and not feeling like a "true student" and "feeling on the defensive all the time." She vividly conveys the sense of fragmentation she feels in the formal learning context, arising from feeling that tutors and the assessment process fail to take account of the "rest of me". As she says, "You're not really assessing me." There is a sense of identity being put at issue here - a theme which, for Janice, related strongly to how she felt as a Black woman in that environment, as illustrated by her account. Diane and Ethel also speak about how the failure of tutors to recognise the different pressures and experiences of mature students gives rise to further stress and disjunction.

As so poignantly described in these various accounts, tutors' behaviours are not experienced in a vacuum. These women have all

spoken about the loss of confidence and self-esteem they have experienced, by virtue of working largely inside their homes. They each described their personal struggles with feeling that their own development can only take place at the expense of their relationships with partners and children. They are experiencing and managing other kinds of disjunction, at home and in the formal learning context. With regard to the latter, for example, Sally spoke about examples of tutors at university using sarcasm and bullying, and her relief that she personally had not been the target of "anything really nasty". She describes a young European woman who was the victim of such behaviour, but had the confidence to,

Field record: " ...put her foot down and she said, I don't want to go to this person's tutorials any more. I think he is behaving badly towards us and we can do without comments like that, so are the rest of you going to back me up? and everyone went, It's, well, it's not too bad" We loathed him! and in the end she said, Well, I am going to change and I said, change to my group." (7, 9: 52/70)

Here she illustrates how the passivity described in the above accounts combines to make the management of such situations difficult in isolation, unless, like the Dutch woman, one is extremely self-assured and assertive.

Similarly, Todd describes how the absence of emotional support, combined with the power of a tutor, had devastating consequences for a woman classmate:

Field record: "I've heard of more suicides here than ever before. *(He referred to an outbreak in a seminar which I observed that morning, when one woman told another woman that she could not cope with her smoking, and that she was feeling particularly stressed because she had tried to commit suicide the previous night)*(Todd explained a bit about this woman)Like _____. She is brilliant. [...] The other day, her tutor was in a bad mood. He screamed at her that she was 'too out of condition, overweight and a stupid woman.' She slashed her wrists last night.[.]" (I, 9:250/14)

The cumulative impact of these various struggles and disjunctions can combine with the ethos and pedagogical approach of the department. For example, in Chapter 4, many women spoke about how they had hated the competitive nature of especially secondary schooling. Sally's thoughts on this are triggered here by her re-reading of the transcript of our earlier interview when she was at Hillcroft, and in particular, about how she felt about the competitive ethos at her secondary school. She had re-encountered a similar ethos at university: "I hate this whole thing of competitiveness. The male thing again." She gives an example of a tutor using this in ways that she found insensitive. He prefaced the giving out of marks for an essay with, "Well, you are all going to hate cleverboots here." This woman received 72% and Sally, 48%, the lowest: "I was so angry by this, all this emphasis on competition (...) and I thought, "How pathetic. (...)It takes me back [to school] (...)whereas it was quite civilised here [Hillcroft]." For Sally, this ethos gave rise to a strong sense of disjunction, that began to undermine her sense of learner identity and possibility.

Alex, a middle class woman, speaks about her expectations having not been met, and similarly refers to gender and age differences: "The teaching style hasn't. Not the men at least. And the other younger students don't feel able to contribute. (...)I feel I'm taking over." She regrets the the lack of emphasis on discussion groups in the department. She does, however, speak about how the very act of leaving the nursing profession and returning to study, has enabled her to persist, and manage any disjunction she is experiencing. But despite her criticism of the teaching style, the relationships and the overall quality of her course, she still echoes the pattern of internalising failure, that in Chapter 4, came across from her and others, who came from middle class homes where achievement in education was a central value: "I haven't achieved as much as I could have. That's my fault for not trying hard enough. If I try hard and fail it's because of me. My fault. If I don't try, I say I could have done it."

4.4. Age and class

Class and age could also combine. (Appendix 44c) As described previously, Peter was already experiencing considerable disjunction in terms of the teaching and learning situation at university. He describes here another kind of disjunction, in relation to age and class dimensions of his identity. He speaks as a middle class person, whose perspectives on issues of privilege and class have been mediated by his experience of working in London in largely low-skilled '9-5 jobs'. His choice of occupations enabled him to pursue his own self-directed studies in the evening. Peter experienced disjunction in the formal learning context largely in relation to the lack of dialogue, and opportunities to challenge and be challenged in that environment. This same concern is elaborated further in his account about living with younger students in residence, whose behaviour, "letting off fire extinguishers" and "throwing flans in each others' face" led him to "resent this middle class environment. (...)I spent all my time going out in London trying not to be a student because my image of students had changed (...)and it had been a nasty shock and I didn't want anything to do with it."

When working class people enter polytechnic or university, something seen largely as existing for middle class people, they too can experience a particular kind of insecurity in relation to that formal learning context, as well as disjunction in relation to their lives and friendships outside the institution. Kath, Kim and Laurence, speak about their experiences as working class adults returning to study:

Field record: Kim." I had internalised the idea that I would not be accepted. My confidence was low. (...)On the outside I was constantly put down: 'What would you know?" Laurence: Me too! "Two people feeling the same thing? Hmmm. Something in that, maybe?"

The opportunity to reflect on their experiences with each other during the course of the interview itself gave rise to new ways of making sense of what they were feeling and experiencing, beyond an interpretation based on individual limitations. They also raise issues

about the 'tools of knowledge' and particularly language, and how the influence of their prior learning has taught them that these are inaccessible, and remote from everyday experience.

An additional account is provided by Ethel, in Appendix 44c.

4.5. Multiple differences

There were a number of illustrations of how the experience of multiple differences, power relations and role disjunction can combine and be interpreted in particular ways for non-traditional students in traditional formal education settings. (Appendix 44d) Study participants' interpretations of these experiences derive from their continual encounters with many of these dimensions in the wider social context as well as their prior learning experiences as students.

For example, Diane, a white working class woman from Scotland, speaks during our second interview at Cityside about her experience of age, class and gender differences in the context of her largely traditional course. In different ways, she acknowledges the complexity of these, as they combine with relationships with tutors and the ethos of a department. She speaks first about issues of gender, but then how class differences can override any sense of 'women's solidarity'. She talks about how,

Field record: "... it's not just about standing up for yourself as a woman and letting me develop. We also have other women to stand up against. We are fighting against them too. Their boundaries. (...)"

Diane spoke about a feminist lecturer who spoke with disdain about another woman who, "even washed [her husband's] shirts." Diane thought, "In an ordinary working class background, you do all the washing at once." I asked her how she felt at times like that, and she said,

Field record: "Anger is too strong a word but it's around, because the situation smacks a bit of the do-gooder. She's trying to help.

It's not necessary to experience everywhere you can help, but if you haven't even picked up that sensitivity to peoples' background. Yes, a lack of awareness and it poses a conflict for me."

Diane also felt a sense of disjunction in relation to her experience of how an emphasis on scientific method can operate at the expense of human understanding - a theme which will be elaborated in the next section. Overall, she interprets the disjunction she experiences as being rooted in tutors' lack of exposure to "real life" - what she calls, "no understanding through experience". She also comments about how class, "doesn't matter [here so much] because there are more working class students. " Diane vividly captures the disjunction that can arise from the failure to acknowledge that different world views might be operating.

Susan's story further illustrates the complexities and struggles operating in terms of these adults' social identity and their experience of these complex social arenas for learning. It may be recalled from the first section of this chapter that Susan had experienced so much disjunction in her prior learning experiences, particularly in relation to class differences, that it was difficult for her to believe that this would not be the case for any formal learning situation. Hillcroft's ethos, and aims to support adult learners, helped to convince her that alternative kinds of experiences were possible. With regard to Hillcroft, she talks about how, regardless of the support offered by this environment, she realised she still had a, "chip on my shoulder. Thought it had gone till here and I realised it was all to do with accent. I switched off because I was more open to a working class accent." Susan conveys the strength of her own class identity by saying, as well as the kind of disjunction that mature students who are in a different social environment with higher education can feel "I guess I must seem more middle class [now] but I am working class. I wouldn't like to think it is gone. But I couldn't guarantee that it wouldn't." Susan also refers to her guilt about studying something that is neither relevant nor useful - another theme that emerged from working class adults'

accounts in Chapter 4 about home and school, and the contrasting meanings of learning in the two environments.

In our follow-up interview when she had moved onto university, she speaks from the perspective of being the only woman, and only mature student in a regular tutor group with largely (but not exclusively) middle-class 18 year olds. Although there was considerable evidence eighteen months after we had first met that Susan was feeling increasingly more integrated in her role as a learner within and outside the system, certain situations still had the power to re-activate deeply felt tensions in her experience as a working class woman in the wider social context. She found her consistent encounters with right wing sympathies difficult, (a trend that her tutor had identified in recent cohorts of students) but she also illustrates how she feels better able to manage a sense of disjunction arising from such experiences: "...one of these was an incredible wind up merchant and what the hell, it enlivened the sessions but a couple in there really felt that. " Nonetheless, she has clear expectations of the role of the tutor, "to arbitrate." Fortunately, she was able to talk about class confrontations with her tutor who shared her concern, since he confessed to her that he had not believed that he would, "end up in a finishing school. "

Susan's description of the behaviours, attitudes and generally passive stance of 18 year olds gives substance to the so often cited concern that the culture of universities is not geared for students who have been traditionally under-represented in higher education.

Nancy, also in a follow up interview after she went on to do a degree at polytechnic after Hillcroft, gives an example of the more subtle ways in which the wider implications of differences can be communicated to students. She found their attitudes to differences good: "positive by saying that no prejudice against anybody." She went on to explain that the majority in her class were women, a common phenomenon on this degree. When I asked her about the lecturers, however, she commented in a way that suggested she had not thought about this difference before: "Majority men. Which was a bit funny.

(...)That they are teaching mostly women [but] most of them were male." A later discussion with Nancy about class also suggested a kind of flatness, and a frustration with it so constantly being at issue within this society. What is perhaps significant is that Nancy chose to leave this course after 6 months, saying that she decided she didn't want any more higher education. She remains unemployed.

Godfrey, Janice and Bill, and then Shanti, Rama and Julien offer a different perspective, as Black students. They describe how tutors' power, coupled with other aspects of social positioning, have meaning both in terms of the institutional and pedagogical context, and the social relations which operate therein, and the wider social context. This can give rise to disjunction on all sorts of levels.

Godfrey and Janice provide a vivid picture about the different kinds of learning experiences and stances generated for them by different kinds of situations: when they are in a minority and when they are learning with other Black people:

Field record:Godfrey. "I never feel comfortable in a room full of whites. Never relaxed. Always on guard. Automatic. Immune to it. Unconscious. I speak in a particular manner. Not me if in a group of Black people. (*Changed body posture, language, phrasing, and went into different role.*) More relaxed. It's me Can curse, do anything. (...)To learn fully must be amongst Black people. Janice: Certainly think you have to be on guard when you are with them. Depends on position, authority. Position. Must think of that. Must infringe on you as a person, depending on the group you are in."

Godfrey asserts, "I need respect in my environment for me to learn." Janice tries to channel her frustration with racism on the course into essays, using these as a vehicle for 'educating tutors'. They both convey how their personal and social identities as learners are often directly challenged and the stress involved in continually having to devise personal strategies for managing the disjunction they are experiencing.

Bill speaks about how power in terms of white and Black, and power in terms of knowledge and control, combine for him in higher education. He refers to his own sense of powerlessness in relation to the 'processing machine' and how if you challenge that, 'You're like a fly. They have the ability to squash you.' He talks about how, at his northern university, he managed the disjunction he felt through self-imposed isolation and withdrawal from social life. The additional dimensions of age and class are suggested. He also conveys a sense of deep regret at how little he feels he has gained, having given up so much.

Shanti, like Bill, also suggests a sense of despair that it is not worth the effort. Her colleagues, Julien and Rama, talk about their own frustration at the contradictions between tutors expressed commitments and how they experience them in actual practice. Shanti does concede however that things are a, "bit more integrated and communal" in this formal learning context, as compared with her previous experiences.

4.6. Reflections

Voice 2: The cumulative impact of these accounts were disturbing. They profoundly shook my own pre-conceived notions about 'being a mature student', and challenged my own simplistic notions about adults as learners and adult learning, as based on the literature. They made me question why I had reduced the complexity of my own experience, as an adult educator and as a mature student myself, to such simplistic formulae. I examined from new perspectives my own sense of disjunction between the work I had engaged in as a consultant working with diverse groups and equal opportunity issues in the public and voluntary sector, and my own idealised image of higher education. My personal reflections on the issues arising from my analysis of these accounts contributed to an emerging map about 'disjunction and integration', raising more questions than answers, and suggesting considerable numbers of issues about the ways in which multiple influences, and their cumulative impact during a learner's life history, can combine to give rise to disjunction and integration in a formal learning context. Cityside, Cycle 1, had raised many issues; but my interviews with Hillcroft students who had moved from one kind of learning situation to another, Cycles 6

and 7, had elaborated them in more depth. The final analysis raised many questions about what kinds of mediating influences in a formal learning context can operate to anticipate and compensate to some extent for the experiences such as have been described here.

5. On Knowing and Knowledge

5.1. Emergent themes

The data suggested two main themes in relation to knowledge and the process of knowing. The first concerns what kinds of knowledge are deemed legitimate in higher education learning contexts and the extent to which traditional academic knowledge is felt to be accessible to, or representative of the knowledge of non-traditional students. The second theme relates to what it means to know, and the process of knowing and exploring knowledge in groups.

Longstanding traditions and norms in the culture of higher education help to determine what constitutes legitimate knowledge expression and forms. Implicit assumptions about such matters can have a powerful impact on what it means to be a learner and to learn in that context. When certain forms of knowledge or knowing, or certain means of expression are denied or rendered invisible, aspects of one's personal and social identity as a learner can be put at risk. It is for this reason that the metaphor of voice figures strongly in this section: a theme that I later discovered ran throughout women's literature, and that became an issue with which I too had to grapple personally.

These themes further elaborate, and indeed can compound, the disjunctions identified previously, both generally and in terms of the experience of power, difference and role disjunction.

5.2. On legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge

A number reported a sense of disjunction with respect to feeling required to abandon certain kinds of knowledge at the door of the institution. (Appendix 45) For example, Fran resists having to accept writing an essay as somehow superior to her other forms of practical and experiential knowledge: "That was all knowledge and that all went up to make me!" She speaks of her struggle with what she sees

as their wanting to, "teach you (...)and compartmentalise their information to such an extent."

Field record: "[teachers in higher education] can't convey what they know. Not only that, when you're at a doctor state, you can only watch out of their own tunnel, and their subject matter. They don't connect it with anybody else's subject matter." (I,9: 279/11-12) .lm4

For Fran subject matter is as much "in her" and about her, and her experience, as it is in and about books or in academics' heads. There is nothing in her experience that has taught her to discriminate between these forms of knowledge, or to elevate one form above another. To deny the validity of her forms was to deny the validity of her personal and social identity, and her prior experiences of learning particularly outside formal education.

Connie describes similar struggles. She despairs that student knowledge is being neglected, and how when such knowledge is brought into and actively used in the formal learning context, it becomes translated into a form of knowledge considered acceptable to that tutor. Its alien character, now divorced from personal experience, is further enhanced by "an elaborated language. " Like Fran, when referring to her own growing doubt that maybe something is wrong with her, she too speaks in terms of, "Is it me? She feels silenced, since "I know what I want to say but I must use your language (*as if she were talking to a tutor*). I don't really want to be a part of that."

I believe Connie and Fran convey an ambivalence about engaging or disengaging with the alternative norms and values. This theme threads its way across many accounts. For learners who have traditionally been under-represented in higher education, the issue sometimes seems to be, "At what cost do I remain here? At what risk to who I am and what I value about myself and my own experience and perspective."

Diane also speaks about how her expectation of her subject bore no resemblance to her own understanding and experience outside formal

education: 'Where is the person!' she asked one of her lecturers, adding that she found this a real shock. She began to feel affirmed towards the end of her second year, since other younger students began to ask the same question, and "a bit more openly."

Bill speaks about his experience of doing a practical engineering course as opposed to doing a university engineering course where abstract and symbolic modes of learning predominate. On the former, he did not feel a sense of disjunction: "learning plus living at home, so amongst my own friends. Felt comfortable." In contrast, he finds his university course far too theoretical: "Haven't actually assimilated it. Need practical to learn my kind of core."

Prior experience, within and outside the formal system, shaped the frameworks within which these adults made sense of their experiences in this new environment. For many, particularly those who had experienced discovery outside the system, a profound sense of the implicit meanings and assumptions they had come to associate with learning comes across. As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, for working class adults who experienced learning outside formal education that compensated for earlier experience, learning seemed to become increasingly associated with particular feelings and processes, rather than a particular place (such as formal education or being with a valued older person in the community).

Susan expresses this tension in a slightly different way, and picks up themes introduced in the previous section. As indicated earlier, Hillcroft enabled her to experience something quite different from what she had experienced before within formal education. As described in the first section of this chapter, she came prepared to experience disjunction, but she gradually began to trust the sense of discovery and excitement, and the sense of integration, that emerged in relation to what she was learning and how she was learning in that formal learning context. When she moved to university, however, she had to develop new strategies for managing. Here, the issue of different forms of knowledge emerged for her, creating a disjunction that she was becoming better able to articulate.

She describes her discomfort about hearing people intellectualise about aspects of her own personal experience as a working class woman: "Don't tell me what I need (*said with great emotion.*) Throughout Susan's history as a learner, as described throughout previous chapters, others have ensured that class has remained central to her experience of learning, within and outside formal education. Only within Saudi Arabia and later at Hillcroft was she able to experience a sense of integration to the extent that she was able to relax and get on with the business of learning, and enjoying it.

For Susan, course content is not neutral. She describes her experience of studying Thompson's, Making of the Working Class, and how on the one hand she respects the empathy conveyed, and how he is, "not as clinically detached as most academics which I think is positive." Nonetheless, Thompson sets up a disjunction for her: "Something jars with him." She describes her reaction to his snipe at the quality of the poetry produced by the Weaver poets: "So still sneering, even while he is saying, 'This is good'. " She challenges another interpretation of other aspects of history, on the grounds of his failure to understand that the style of communication adopted by the working class person is one which,

Field record: "... any working class person would have used to a social superior and this is what he is discounting it on and all these contradictions all the way through [that] he apparently can't see."

She describes how she brought this out in the seminar, but how only the tutor could see what she was trying to get across:

Field record: "(...)education tends to be linked so often with intelligence. They therefore come out with this equation that if you are illiterate you are unintelligent. You are stupid. And this is something I bitterly bitterly resent. (...)Like maybe they can't read or write too well but they have a shrewd brain." (She then proceeded to speak at length about men in her own family.)

With such examples, Susan captures how supposedly 'neutral' or 'objective' academic knowledge and her social identity as a learner set up particular kinds of disjunctions that are quite complex.

Janice talks about her experience of the learning environment and the tutor's handling of the syllabus, in terms of her social identity and expectations as a learner. She offers as an example a white lecturer's comments about Black people. This set up a powerful disjunction for her. She speaks about feeling invisible, "that we are talking about people 'out there' and not 'in here'". The tutor's power in the wider social context, and his use of this within the teaching learning situation, interacts with his treatment of the course syllabus, to create a strong sense of invisibility, and indeed disjunction.

Additional accounts on these themes are provided by Karen and Andrea in Appendix 45.

Voice 2: Such accounts heightened my own awareness to similar disjunctions I had experienced as a learner when there was that sense that somehow what we were discussing had nothing to do with 'me' as a person. That somehow it was acceptable to disassociate academic content from personal experience, and analyse it as if we, and our experience, were not part of that: however much such experience might put the 'legitimate' knowledge to some kind of test. These kinds of accounts enabled me to begin to make sense of my own discomfort in particular kinds of learning situations. For example, I remembered situations where it felt taboo to consider how theory jarred with peoples' lived experience and how uneasy this made me feel. Wider questions this began to raise for me about 'objective knowledge'. Whose knowledge was it? These were not issues which I had studied academically before, nor grappled with personally or professionally. It set up some profoundly unsettling questions, and began a process of, in Mezirow's words, perspective transformation (1978) that brought with it an even greater sense of disjunction, since the world as I had 'read' it and 'known it' was maybe quite different. Gradually coming to understand my own situation as a learner in certain kinds of situations better also enabled me to think more about why it was so hard to find a voice in certain formal learning contexts...

5.2. Exploring and expressing knowledge and knowing

Here the emphasis is not just on forms of knowledge, but on the process of knowing, and exploring knowledge, and knowing, with others.

(Appendix 46) A common theme in the literature relates to women's confidence - or lack of it. Here, women in particular speak about some of the conditions that militate against their feeling sufficiently safe to express themselves in particular environments, and the impact of some of the boundaries set up in particular kinds of formal learning contexts against knowing and certain kinds of knowledge. They also suggest the kinds of conditions that they see as conducive to maximising their willingness and potential to learn in particular environments.

Vera speaks about her developing, but fragile, sense of confidence about expressing herself, and what she considers herself to 'know'. Whereas Hillcroft had given her confidence, she speaks about her own anxiety and fear of being judged in a seminar at the polytechnic. She then refers back to the first time she summoned up the courage to speak at Hillcroft, and how, should she have been ignored, her meagre confidence would have been destroyed, "for doing anything later." She speaks about how invaluable a role feedback from not just tutors but colleagues played in building her confidence, something she has experienced 'not so much' at the polytechnic. She speaks also about the negative impact of competition, and indicates her view that this is often used to the detriment of learning and development.

Alex feels that, "both sides of the story not given. You must read what they say and mustn't learn the other side because you'll get penalised. They must hear their version. " She talks about how, when she raises questions,

Field record: "... they give me a hard time. They make me feel that I have to justify, defend what I say, rather than exploring together. That gets me angry inside. And then I tend to lay off."

Alex once again captures the ambivalence theme that occurs over and over again in women's stories. She feels silenced by the norm in her academic environment that, 'you have to know all there is that you must know about that to say anything about [a topic]. " She speaks about her frustration with not hearing about how tutors personally

think and believe: "personal knowledge is what I like to hear. Their experiences. The rest I can read in a book."

Shanti refers directly to her sense of disjunction in her own terms, and Julien offers his interpretation of why:

Field record: Shanti." You end up feeling so fragmented. I really feel fed up. There's no point in opening it up, is there. It won't make any difference since you'll never be able to say what you truly feel."

Julien. (*words and gestures indicating sense of not being heard*)
"It's like they're playing with us all, of a game." (I, 9: 224/20)

Diane meshes these various themes, speaking about her 'ongoing conflict' with lecturers, illustrated with many examples. She expresses the strong sense of disjunction she feels between the public role played by tutors, where they 'act as if' they experience no difficulty with conflicting views, and her own lived experience. Like Alex, she finds resistance to questioning: "They are just hearing the criticism." She finds the derogatory remarks, "poisonous".

I believe that Diane also conveys the complexity with which issues of difference can combine with the ethos and traditions of particular learning contexts to give rise to profound disjunction. For women, like Diane, who had been lucky enough to experience alternative learning processes and relationships that had compensated for prior disjunction, there is a sense of fragility and fear of being trampled underfoot: the fear that what they had discovered would be taken away by 'the authorities'? At the time of our interview, Diane was trying to make sense of these experiences. She describes how she is, "trying for a balance between the masculine and feminine parts of myself. My feeling side is well honed." When I asked her to elaborate, she openly groped for the words to capture her struggle with this particular sense of disjunction:

Field record: "Well, I guess I see masculine as 'intellectual, analytical.' But (*she became excited*) I am learning that there are

different ways of thinking. It need not be that way, but it can still be masculine. (*She became pensive*) I haven't really formulated this for myself. (...) My idea was, if I get it together intellectually, that's using the masculine side of me. But that is not the case! I can use them both. Somewhere I got the concept that masculine thinking was analytical. I can be analytical but in a way that is not the same as analytical here. For example, you can still see things clearly, but it doesn't have to be in their intellectual way."

Over the course of our two interviews, Diane demonstrated her increased resilience, and capacity to manage the disjunction she is experiencing: "It would have stopped me when I was younger. But now I just say, "O.K. I've made a fool out of myself. It's o.k. for me. But Darcy calls it their 'intellectual masturbation.'" Diane describes how during her first year she felt a , "great separation" between the kind of learning experiences she discovered outside formal education, and what she encountered on her degree course: "Two extreme environments." But by the second year, she felt better: "I knew I wasn't going to lose [what I had from those experiences]." In this, Diane suggests a theme which recurs again and again. Prior experiences of discovery, whether they occurred within or outside formal education as an adult, allowed for a major re-structuring of how some of these learners saw themselves, and their possibilities. They provided an experience of integration, for the first time. At the same time, such experiences seemed to provide a kind of 'special reserve' which could be drawn upon when subsequent experiences of learning and being a learner were characterised by a sense of disjunction.

Darcy, a colleague of Diane's, was identified as one of the brightest students on this highly academic course, as discussed previously in Section 3. For Darcy, like Diane, core values about knowing and learning are at odds with each other in the academic environment. She communicates a sense of conviction twinned with despair,, having learned elsewhere that learning need not be like this.

Darcy captures the different assumptions and meanings that can be at odds with each other in an academic environment. She speaks about

'feminine and masculine parts', equating this with something to do with being on a science based course. She also suggests that the disjunction she experiences is linked to different assumptions about how knowledge can be explored and expressed:

Field record: "When I say knowledge, for them it means, 'the more they put across for us to learn. The more we know. But we don't know these things. We're all learning together. Some authority says, 'This is the way it is, and I am saying, "No!" (...) Maybe it's about learning to trust yourself. (...) But who is to say these logical thinkers are the thinkers? They're not to say who's right or wrong. They and we all have points of view. But you are made to feel you are not right."

Darcy and Diane powerfully illustrate this struggle which is suggested by so many women's accounts, and indeed in my own story, as illustrated by the second voice throughout this thesis. They suggest that, in Perry's terms, as discussed in Chapter 1, their own contextual relativistic views of knowledge are at odds with a more dualistic portrayal of knowledge being suggested by tutors' stances and treatment of academic material.

Sally, when reading the transcript of our previous interview from the vantage point of having moved ~~from~~ Hillcroft to a university science based department.

Field record: "I hope it will be challenging. But I have a deep suspicion that it will not be as open-minded as here. I am a little bit alarmed about having to compete with men, but I also think I will find that an interesting challenge. I expect to get a little disillusioned (...) "

She goes on to talk about her concern about the 'empirical scientific' basis for the subject: "I don't think it has to be treated as such, but that is the suggestion, that it must." She anticipates that there will be , "certain restrictions and restraints that will be put across with our learning." The resource of strength that Hillcroft had built up for her, and her sense of learner identity and possibility at this

time led her to conclude: "But I regard this all as quite interesting". She added however, "I don't know whether or not it will be so."

In our second interview, Sally describes the difficulties she has encountered at length, accounting for them largely in gender terms, as documented in previous accounts. She concludes that she is 'oversensitive'. As discussed in Part I, and through the second voice of this thesis, my own personal work on these issues, as generated by the research itself, enabled me to 'hear' this profound shift in how she described herself as a learner. She suggests the extent to which she is personally making her own meaning about what learning and being a learner means, drawing on her experiences of many learning contexts, within and outside formal education: her marriage, her work, her experience at Hillcroft, her discussions with her mother and a close friend from Hillcroft with whom she kept in touch after moving onto university and who was experiencing similar disjunctions. Nonetheless, I was struck by her use of the term 'oversensitive': this alerted me to some kind of internalising process at work, particularly as I had come to recognise how I too had internalised so many of these difficulties as a failing in me, rather than a function of a particular kind of interaction. I asked her if this has come from "the outside in any way, in terms of male and female?"

Field record: "Yeah, I do. I think that as a woman, again, going back to this as a male scientific positivistic society, you are not supposed to be intuitive, sensitive. Really only so far as it suits you. (...) and if you are oversensitive, it is regarded as 'wet'. "

She describes how in a research methods course, for the first time she was encouraged to interpret what was happening:

Field record: "I found myself almost pathetically saying that it could be said that this person felt such and such an emotion (..) and he said, "Yes, yes" wanting me to [go on] and I thought, My god, he actually wants me to do like English literature type stuff. To look at something in an intuitive way. I couldn't

believe it. This just can't be right. (...) But the next day, you turn up and it is definitely science!"

This particular lecturer thus helps to validate something that she feels she is being taught to 'devalue'.

5.4. Reflections

What is suggested in these accounts are some of the consequences of knowing and knowledge as separate and as divorced from personal meaning. These adults' identities as learners suggest a central need and value concerned with understanding self -in-relation to others and the world. Each person in the study is constructing their own personal meaning, based on the influences of their prior experiences. They personally interpret what academic knowledge means, and what it means to know in an academic environment. But these different meanings are seldom surfaced, much less acknowledged.

The notion of an objective truth comes across as essentially alien. Concerns about balance, and about how the tutor personally relates to the knowledge which he or she is imparting, were also prevalent, particularly on the part of non-traditional students in traditional higher education settings. These various themes intermesh in complex ways, either to silence or to draw out learners. Over and over again, I felt the deep sense of disjunction that some adults felt existed between who they were as learners and whether and how their sense of possibility was being eroded or enhanced by their experiences in higher education. If erosion predominated over enhancement, something quite central about who they were could be felt to be placed at risk. In turn, disturbing questions about, at what cost and to what end, and for what gain, were surfaced.

Up until now, I have concentrated on learners' descriptions of what they were experiencing as learners, with the emphasis being placed largely on disjunction and how they managed this. In the sections which follow, I shall focus on how certain kinds of relationships and teaching and learning situations can serve to compensate for

prior or concurrent disjunction and indeed mediate the quality of the learning experience.

Section 6: Mediating Quality

6.1. Conditions conducive to integration

On a number of occasions in the interviews, adults described particular kinds of relationships, both individual and group, which served both to mediate their prior experiences of disjunction within the formal education, and compensate for a sense of disjunction in relation to particular aspects of a course. (Appendix 47) Such relationships were characterised by a particular kind of dialogue. Peers, family and friends, and tutors were all seen to play a vital role in enabling adults to manage the transition to a formal learning context and to develop therein.

Vera gropes for the words to describe the kind of dialogue that encourages development and enables them to feel integrated as learners within a learning environment. Feeling a 'part of' hearing different points of view and interpreting together is central concern for her. She explains how she finds it difficult, "to read a piece and decide what's important out of that. But if you discuss it with someone else, you find you don't get 10 points but 25. She talks about how hard it is to, "put forward one little idea" in a group, apologising that, this, "might seem pathetic but when you do, you have the courage to do it, it is amazing how that starts off other peoples' little ideas."

As Andrea says, "I think it's when people do let their hair down and say exactly what they are thinking!(VI, 9: 027/35)

What 'talk' feels like in groups can be central to whether and how themes of difference and power as a source of disjunction figured in the accounts. Vera speaks specifically about the kind of tolerance that emerged from living and learning together at Hillcroft: "No one was ostracised for their views (...) and I think it was fairly healthy. A tolerance." Nonetheless, she acknowledged that some people were terribly, "reticent about sharing in that way."

Penny talks about the capacity of women to build each other up when they have a 'break from men'. This support helps to, "build up part of you" and then you can tackle whatever it is needs doing and that is good. Along with." It is this latter emphasis that seems to summarise the essence of the 'in-relation theme' that was so distinctive in the women's accounts. Susan also speaks about her own discovery of 'what great company women could be' in another kind of situation, and how many women needed an all female environment, 'where they would never be put down. '

The theme of 'talk', and what quality may mean, especially for women, will be emphasised especially in the final section of this chapter, where study participants give 'advice to tutors '.

By following up women across two different kinds of formal learning contexts, comparisons emerged, as they described what it meant and felt like to be a learner in one situation in relation to another. (Appendix 48) Janet, Vera, and Andrea, whom I interviewed a year after they finished their Hillcroft course (Cycle 6), talk about how they always felt that someone was available to listen and support. They convey a sense of there having been constructive opportunities to work through difficulties, as opposed to their experience in higher education where, 'it's just moaning.' Nancy speaks first from the perspective of her Hillcroft course, before moving onto polytechnic. She speaks about how the importance to her of the size of the group, a theme which ran throughout her learning history. She describes her increased confidence in her capacity to manage not just the examinations, but also relationships with teachers and other students that may not be as supportive as at Hillcroft. She reflects retrospectively on her experience at Hillcroft, in the light of having decided to leave her degree course. She describes the memory of a feeling of 'togetherness' that she enjoyed and 'got a lot back from'. She also describes the freedom she felt to link things, when they would 'crop up...which was quite good' and how this capacity to make connections was enhanced in the second year.

What is continually suggested by these and other accounts is that the quality of dialogue that enables a management of disjunction, and

learning, is to some extent intertwined with a valuing of different forms of knowledge and different ways of expressing and exploring knowing and understanding, as discussed in the previous section.

6.2. Managing disjunction: compensating relationships

Various kinds of influences were cited as significant in compensating for and helping the adult to manage an overall sense of disjunction.(Appendix 49).For students whose experience of formal education has been characterised largely by disjunction, being able to identify personally with a person in a position of authority and power comes across as an important mediating factor. For example, Susan struggles to describe the importance of having lectures with those whom she could personally identify, in terms of class and gender and her frustration with the extent to which class issues do not go away for her at university: "Another tutor, I had, we are talking a different ball game here because the guy is working class (...) and just a completely different ball game." The difference for her, as a working class woman, was that he did not have that, "holier than thou attitude". For Susan, "he's been there, I've been there, and 'what's that got to do with it' kind of thing?" She suggests how problematic she finds her own class identity. On the one hand, she wants to, "have done with this silly class thing" but on the other, she realises that this is not something that people find it easy to be objective about: "I don't quite know how to explain it."

Connie also talks about how she finds it easier to relate to women. "Men, (...) become 'teacher'," "They have not experienced what we have." She talks about how angry she feels when what you have to say is ignored, because it "doesn't fit their views."

Peter, it may be recalled, walked out of his course because of the disjunction he was experiencing between the idea of higher education and what actually took place. He speaks about the extent of his depression but how he eventually, persuaded by friends, returned to speak to the tutor with whom he had begun to develop a particular quality of dialogue before he left. Her willingness to share her own sense of "raging rough" at the absurdity of her role and the system

itself helped to compensate for the disjunction Peter was experiencing generally on the course:

Field record:"What convinced me. (...)she considered herself to raise questions and be a bit seditious and (...)I had quite a good personal relationship with her (...)so I decided to take the degree."

For students whose overall experience of higher education at a particular stage is characterised largely by disjunction, other kinds of relationships are critical. Susan and Sally also speak about the vital role that other kinds of relationships played in enabling them to manage the disjunction they both felt upon their transition to university. For example, Susan speaks about how other mature women, including a former course colleague at Hillcroft, kept her from dropping out or transferring.

Sally lived at home after transferring to university. Her relationship with her mother, and the influence of their prior learning, characterised largely by integration, was a significant source of strength in her management of this situation at university: "I don't think I would have survived it. She is not just a mother, but I am aware that she is a very good friend. (...)I can discuss all kinds of things with her."

An additional account is offered by Diane, who speaks about the importance of relationships with peers. (Appendix 49)

It might be argued that Hillcroft provides an 'exceptional environment' in which women in this study were enabled in ways that are beyond the capacities of most learning environments. However, many of the kinds of relationships and processes, coupled with the academic rigour, that characterised the Hillcroft environment are the same as those which are associated with 'good practice' in the literature on working with mature students, and on access and community education courses. But words such as 'collaborative and equal relationships'

and 'valuing adults' experiences' were given a more real, and far deeper meaning for me in the context of these life stories.

7. Changes

7.1. Introduction

So what were some of the outcomes identified by students, as a result of their engagement with these different kinds of formal learning contexts. Although I did not systematically pursue this theme with each participant, sufficient material was generated to warrant attention, encapsulating three main themes:

An increased sense of integration about the self as a learner and what it means to learn: 'because of' and 'in spite of' the formal learning context

An increased capacity to manage disjunction, including through taking increased responsibility for where and how learning might best take place.

A sense of personal potential as a lifelong learner, and an improved ability to know how to learn, generally and in terms of the wider social context

Each of these are dealt with in this section.

7.2. An increased sense of integration

Integration describes a sense of wholeness; of having moved from being without a rudder, subject to a host of forces, to having a stronger sense of one's own worth and more in control of one's own life. A number of adults felt that their experience of higher education had given them a deeper understanding about what learning personally means to them, irrespective of context. This thread recurs through a number of the adults' reflections on what they had gained and how they had changed. They convey a sense of feeling better able to take responsibility for choosing where and how to learn. (Appendix 50a)

The overall sense of integration and validation seems to have emerged either as a result of successfully managing the unconstructive forces that gave rise to a sense of disjunction, or by virtue of experiencing the benefits of a learning environment where any disjunction experienced was seen as part of a process of positive growth and development. One might speak of gaining a rudder 'in spite of the learning experience' or because of it. It is the latter group, and particularly the women from Hillcroft, who spoke most about what they had gained. For others, there was a sense of having survived, and as mentioned previously, for Darcy survival meant leaving the course.

7.2.1. Development 'because of'

There were those who suggested that their sense of learner identity and possibility had been as a direct result of their experiences on their programmes. For example, Kath approached me in the coffee bar at Cityside one day, having seen my letter of introduction. She said that she was on a course which she felt had enabled her to make "intellectual sense" of much of her experience during the ten years she had been learning through living, working and also being unemployed, outside formal education:

Field record: *"She said that she wasn't sure if she had learned anything but that she had gained confidence. She said that her experience of the degree had changed the way she viewed her previous learning and that initially she tended to devalue it entirely." (I, 9: 244/1)*

Rita speaks about how important it was for her at Hillcroft to learn to value her differences through working closely with others, and to recognise the particular way in which she learns best: by learning "what strings them together". Another kind of formal learning context might have emphasised more linear or surface approaches to learning (as per the Lancaster/Gothenburg research referred to in Chapter 1) or greater isolation and autonomy. She speaks about the critical importance of learning, by being with others, that she can be herself without fear of rejection. As it may be recalled, she had learned as a young person that to be bright and a woman resulted in social isolation. Rita emphasises that how she has come to know about herself in relation to other people: "by learning they don't do things the same as me. So this is how I know what I am doing. (...) It doesn't mean anything until we have had the discussion."

Nancy talks about the value of learning "to stand up for myself and to sort things out for myself" and discovering that in fact she could manage academic work. Like Rita, she refers to the value of learning-relation-to others, "in discussions and talking to people. You want to get more out of people and them to listen to you and I think it's given me that (...) and I am more positive in myself."

Vera speaks about the value of learning at Hillcroft that tutors are "ordinary people" and how this enabled her to not "feel the same sort of reverence" for people at the poly. She speaks about how at the poly, they treat her as an equal, but at the same time, she conveys a strong expectation that, as a result of her prior learning experiences at Hillcroft, so they should! She speaks about discovering that she is as capable as them: "I can have ideas too!"

7.2.2. Development 'in spite of'

Diane and Darcy speak about their development slightly differently. They illustrate what came across as change 'in spite of' in the various accounts of adults who felt overall a sense of disjunction on their programmes. It is also worth recalling that Diane had prior learning experience of her counselling course to enable her to sustain the separation she felt upon arrival, and to realise that they could not take that away from her. She reflects on the "real shock to my ideal" that came when she realised that her own social skills were

considerably better than those of lecturers. She conveys a sense of regret about what she and tutors might have shared, based on her own strong sense of conviction, based on experience, about what learning together might mean. Instead, "they are the ones who are asking us to learn in their ways."

Darcy suggests a metaphor of standing 'outside' a wall. Internally there are "they [who] have the knowledge. Who am I? And my desire was to be one of them." She speaks with some disdain about her course, and the stress she has experienced. Her sense of conviction about how learning can be different evolves from her own discoveries about learning outside the formal education system. As mentioned previously, it is here that she decided to ^{dis}continue her education, after two years as a top student on this course. She emphasises that she now realises that, "I generate the learning. As well as receive it."

7.3. An increased capacity to manage disjunction

With a greater sense of integration emerging through validation of one's capacity to survive and sometimes thrive in a formal learning context comes also an enhanced sense of one's capacity to manage disjunction: either when it occurs or by being proactive in one's choices about where and how to learn. This theme interweaves with the notion of greater risk-taking. (Appendix 50b)

Sheila and Rita speak about how they feel more able to manage situations that previously, in their formal education, might have given rise to a sense of powerlessness and disjunction. Sheila speaks confidently about feeling better able to handle differences, especially those related to social class. She acknowledges that in another learning context she would still be likely to experience, "those feelings all over again but I feel more able to handle them and listen to people with different backgrounds."

Rita gives an example of her increased resilience: feeling "not very o.k. at the moment and you [referring to a particular lecturer] do not make me feel o.k. but I am going to keep going because I know that." She describes how she "worked it out inside until I could cope with it." Interestingly enough, however, she speaks about 'we' and 'us', as if she sensed some kind of difference between this male lecturer's approach to teaching and learning and the kind of approach which she and other women had come to experience as enabling. She describes how she draws on the positive reservoir of experience provided by her Returning to Learning course, thus providing another example of how prior integrating experience can help to provide a 'special reserve' for coping with subsequent disjunction. Equally, however, she also conveys the possibility of particular teacher attitudes and behaviours being able to cause her to feel 'squashed', to "shrivel", "bounce" or "walk out". What is significant is her wider range of strategies for coping.

Susan in referring to previous experiences as a learner spoke about how her capacity to learn was dependent upon whether she liked the teacher. At the end of her Hillcroft course, however, when I asked her about her expectations of university, for the first time, she suggests that she is now able to put her interest in the subject first. Paradoxically, the more she does that, she finds that it is

the tutors who find it difficult to handle her willingness to become actively involved in critical debate, without taking it personally! In describing the experience of interview for university, and her sense that the tutor didn't like her, she suggests a tremendous increase in confidence. Overall, I believe these accounts further reinforce the longlasting value of particular kinds of preparatory/orientation programmes for mature students returning to traditional academic learning contexts.

The increased confidence does not come across as indicative of a stage development, but rather the image of a spiral is suggested for me. Many suggest that certain experiences as learners would have the potential to activate deep-seated memories, and render the rudder inoperative. For example, Rita above outlined four possible reactions to teachers she might experience as negative.

Fran, who consistently came across as a survivor, has devised a variety of strategies for managing. She stresses the importance of an action plan, that requires constant re-writing, as goals change. She captures the role disjunction she must juggle and her need to see friends: "What we have to do is sit the degree with the lifestyle [which we already have] which is very difficult. " Despite her pragmatism and determination to persist, she continues to feel a sense of her own fragility. Her prior learning, in her family and the wider social context, can still give rise to feeling little sense of her own possibility as a learner. She recounts a kind of disjunction, between having particular aspirations and what she feels obliged to do:

Field record: "If I were perfectly honest (...)what I would say is that I would like to go on and do research but the thing is, I don't think I am bright enough so I still, that is, nobody can shift that except me, and until I get reinforcement that I am, you see, I am still suffering from...(..)I am still talking in terms of, "If I pass." (...) My secret fantasy late at night would be to go and do a PhD but you know, I am practical minded enough, to know that probably won't ever happen. (..)But you see it has to come from inside. It doesn't matter who says what outside."

Fran's spiral of confidence, however, remains dependent upon others' affirmation and encouragement, as well as on her special reserves. Her increased confidence is laced with lingering doubts that have their roots in the learner identity that was shaped well before she returned to do a degree. Fran emphasises the vital role that her friendship with Georgette has played in enabling her to manage: "we sit and talk and tell each other how good we are and it works but not if you don't have any contact with anyone else."

Over the course of our interview, Fran gradually unveiled the complex dimensions to what it meant to her to learn and be a learner. At the beginning of our interview, I had a sense of her almost convincing herself that it was entirely up to her to make it. Towards the very end of our two hour group session, she is openly vulnerable, in her description of her hopes, her own vulnerabilities, and the sense to which her sense of learner identity is determined almost entirely in-relation to others.

Additional accounts are provided in Appendix 50b by Vera, Janet and Sally.

7.4. 'Learning to learn'

A number of adults spoke about how their experience of formal learning contexts provided them with an increased sense of their own capacity, and skills, for continuing to learn how to learn. A number spoke about being a lifelong learner. Others also spoke about how 'learning to learn' embraced a totality of experiences, not just an academic sense. (Appendix 50c)

For example, Georgette speaks about her struggle to assess her own abilities, and to maintain a sense of balance that passing her exams is not the be all and end all. Again, the importance of being able to be 'in-relation- to others' is conveyed. She describes how she is getting better able to, "and my ability to assess [whether I did all right] for myself is better. " Pam refers to her increased capacity to determine her own learning goals and assess herself against those.

Janice talks about her having been helped to learn to not take appearances as necessarily being true: learning that, in the context of her struggles with a sense of disjunction on the course, would have deep personal meaning for her as a Black woman.

(Additional accounts are provided in Appendix 50c by Marion,^{Sally,} Kath, Kim and Laurence)

8. Advice to Tutors

8.1. Introduction

I close this chapter with some accounts in which 'advice to teachers' is offered. On the one hand, these provide further insights into the interpretative frameworks through which adults make sense of their experiences of higher education. On the other, such accounts may help

to empower tutors who 'know these things so well', but also those who are concerned to be more effective with adults as learners.

During the course of the early research cycles, I would sometimes ask participants directly about what they wanted and needed from teachers in formal learning contexts to enable them to learn and develop to full potential in that situation. In Cycle 5 of the study, however, I used a role play approach, in order to get at these needs from another angle. It is this approach which predominates in this section, and therefore, the voices of women are strongest here.

To summarise the latter approach, upon which the majority of material in this chapter draws, I would ask participants to imagine that I had just finished my PhD, was an expert in a particular subject, and that my first teaching job was with adults such as themselves, many of whom had left school with no qualifications and had been away from education for some time. I suggested they advise me as to how I might best approach this challenge, based on their own experience as a learner in higher education. The majority related to this approach easily, often going straight into role with little prompting. Two did not, immediately showing their discomfort. In each case, I respected this, not wishing to push it as a means of eliciting their perceptions. Afterwards, we would talk about how it felt to shift roles, and interact in this way in the course of the interview, thus offering an opportunity to 'debrief'. All but the few who proceeded with the approach with enthusiasm found it 'interesting', 'good', often commenting about its effectiveness in surfacing some deeply felt concerns. At such times, the good will that almost all participants felt towards tutors generally was evident. Moreover, their motivations for being involved in the study became more apparent, stemming often from a wish to 'help' tutors with regard to mature students, recognising that this was an area to which they were often new and felt vulnerable.

Direct questioning combined with the role play approach over the course of various interviews gave rise to slightly different perspectives on needs and expectations, and how these had been shaped

by prior learning. The role play, in particular, helped to draw out issues which seemed to matter most to these adults as learners, and as such, lend more explicitness and clarity to the kinds of learning situations and relationships which they consider conducive to generating a sense of integration in themselves as learners. As such, I saw it as an appropriate way of ending this Chapter.

8.2. Emergent themes

We often speak about teaching and learning as if they were simply a function of subject expertise, skill and method. These adults' accounts, however, illustrate the extent to which for them, the quality of teaching, and indeed of learning, is mediated by the 'personal stance' of the teacher. I use this term in the sense of Salmon (1988, 1989) who suggests that, "the material of learning has traditionally been viewed in different terms from those that define the learner." (1989, p. 231) For Salmon, the metaphor of personal stance lays emphasis on the personal positions of teachers and learners, and how they give meaning to their learning:

"How we place ourselves, within any learning context, whether formal or informal, is fundamental. This is not just a matter of 'attitude', in so far as it defines our own engagement with the material; it represents the very stuff of learning itself. ... how we position ourselves towards [each other] in any educational setting ... is what governs the limits and possibilities of our engagement together, what shapes and defines the material we construct out of that engagement." (1989, p. 231)

In the 'advice to tutors' which follows (Appendix 51) study participants' perceptions and experiences of teachers' personal stances towards them as adult learners are seen as vital to their feeling able to enter into the possibility of education. There is a further elaboration of themes relating to integration, and the role of relationships in mediating disjunction, explored in previous chapters in Part II.

Gaynor to some extent can identify the kinds of skills and attitudes she needs in order to feel able and willing to learn in

an academic learning situation. The themes of patronising, and a self-consciousness that this would be an obvious concern for tutors, recur again and again in women's accounts. She gropes, however, for the words to express what it is that is offered her by a particular teacher, with whom she feels most engaged and most able to learn. She does however capture the positive impact of a teacher who can be transparent as to who she is as a person, and "her own inadequacies", and how this opens up possibilities for her to relate and learn in that kind of relationships.

Fran speaks about the need for someone, "with communication skills" and for tutors who can, "break into a language that you can understand," and can use a "reinforcing way of learning." The theme of intrusion once again recurs. She talks about how tutors "rub up their own ego". She gives rise to her belief that teachers should not feel taken off on a tangent if students try to make connections with their own experience. (I, 9: 279/11-12)

A number expressed their need to feel that the teacher had a commitment to recognising previous damage and actively repairing confidence, particularly in the case of women. Sally was concerned that teachers took account of differences of age and experience, as well as those of gender, in her advice to me as this 'green but expert' tutor. She asserts the vital importance of recognising diversity, both in adults' backgrounds and in the pressures they are under. She speaks specifically about the need for 'me' to be, "very patient, because most women have the impression that they are no good at things and certainly, that they don't have as much clout in the world as men do." She speaks about how I, as a tutor in role play, need to think about how I shall repair confidence, and to prepare my material in ways that don't frighten women, "before they even start." (V 9: 27/35) She stresses the importance of recognising differences in women's pacing and patternings in group dialogue. For example, she cautions me in role to "encourage those who are quiet" but equally not to, "bully people into speaking." She suggests that there must be "subtle ways in which you can include people..." She acknowledges that women are quite enthusiastic, and will open up, "once they get to know you."

Sally believes that women arrive in higher education, in a, "delicate state - the only way you can describe it is that." For her, confidence building is integral to the, "ability to learn." She goes on to say, they need to be able to talk about their worries and fears." The conviction with which she admonishes me to build confidence and to repair damage is indicative of the extent to which she too had spiralled back into considerable self-doubt as a result of her new learning situation.

Marge Piercy's (1978) poem, 'Unlearning to not speak (given in Chapter 2) seems to capture a theme in a number of the women's advice.

Karen demonstrates similar attunements to women's rhythms of hesitancy and opening up, based on her own experience of two contrasting learning contexts. She echoes the importance of recognising differences and being sensitive to feelings. She like so many others emphasises drawing people out and building their confidence up. But in addition she outlines the kinds of conditions that, in her experience, can help people to unlearn to not speak. She implies how easily tutors can, even unintentionally, abuse their power to the detriment of the learner. Speaking from the perspective of Hillcroft, before moving into her university learning situation, she talks about the need for tutors to approach people, not in terms of their role but on a, "one to one basis, a personal basis, not as a teacher pupil." She talks about the need for me (in role) to understand what shuts some down and draws others out. For her, *feeling* treated like an adult, "on an equal footing" is critical. She cautions me also against patronising, and harsh criticism, suggesting that this may be how teachers are experienced, even though this is unintended. Again, like others, she conveys the importance to her of knowledge, "being shared, not dictated" and stresses the need for me to empathise with 'my students' because, "these women have gone through the same situations you have." ((V, 9: 275/14) She also cautioned me that my approach might seem patronising or unjustifiable. Throughout the course of the role play, Karen stressed the specialised nature of any job that involves helping adults to learn.

I believe Karen and Sally capture the unintentional consequences of certain behaviours on the part of academic specialists which can combine with other kinds of power to intimidate learners such as herself, and make it difficult for them to 'unlearn not to speak.'

According to these adults to encourage this 'unlearning' and to nurture an overall sense of integration and possibility for education demands a recognition of differences, a kind of integrity in the personal stance of tutors and a particular kind of 'quality of dialogue emerging from 'learning in relation'.

Rita's story also illustrates how to not learn-in-relation, to not feel able to make connections, can undermine her possibilities for engagement with tutors and with academic material.

The theme of making connections, in relation to subject matter and to other people, so strong across the advice to tutors, is perhaps best summarised by Sally:

Field record: "No subject is an island. All interconnect, and interrelate. And same with the students: they all interconnect and react with each other and need to bounce ideas off each other. " (V 9: 271/35)

(Additional accounts from Frank, Rita, Victoria and Penny are provided as well as in Appendix 51)

9. A rich mosaic?

The voices that are strongest in this section come from Hillcroft women, all of whom experienced a sense of integration with regard to what it meant to learn and be a learner in that environment. As portrayed within this Chapter, accounts of learning situations where a sense of integration is described convey an interweaving of strands of self, experience, subject and relationships; of high expectations, of support and intellectual stimulation. For many adults in the study, there seemed to be a vital need to make connections, with one's life, with other disciplines, with issues that personally mattered,

and with experience that was both prior to and had also emerged out of that course. For many in the study, such processes were what 'being a learner' and 'learning' were all about: regardless of context. Such meanings were not peripheral to a sense of learner identity and possibility: they were absolutely central. Their stories challenge us to discover new meanings for 'quality' and 'standards' in higher education. Overall, I believe the cumulative impact of these adults' stories create a kind of mosaic of meaning, whereby time past and time present interweave with the personal and the social under various kinds of conditions in ways that either enhance or curtail a learner's sense of identity and possibility.

But before summarising the various dimensions to this mosaic, and considering the wider questions and issues suggested by this study, I first conclude Part II with an account of my attempts to check whether my interpretation of the key themes in these stories, from which I learned so much, had meaning and credibility to those who participated, and to other adult learners.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CYCLE 8: CHECKING FOR CREDIBILITY AND MEANINGFULNESS OF THE FINAL ANALYSIS

1. Review of Purposes

Credibility checking, and testing for meaningfulness of outcomes are processes that I have attempted to convey throughout this study, since they are integral to the values and axioms underpinning a post-positivist study, as discussed in Part I. I have thus, in the words of Lincoln and Guba (1985):

"sought to carry out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found credible is enhanced, and second, to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied." (p. 296)

As discussed in Chapter 3, my own critical reflections on myself as the human instrument, coupled with searching for negative cases, continual data analysis, and follow-up of participants were all representative of an attempt to carry out an inquiry that would be regarded as worthy of trust and attention.

Cycle 8, however, was concerned exclusively with checking out for credibility and meaningfulness, rather than the continual generation of data, or the testing out or elaboration of emergent themes or patterns with learners in different kinds of situations. Did what I had written seem familiar or unfamiliar to those who had told me their stories? Did my interpretations of many different stories across the 7 cycles jar or cohere with participants' lived experience? If the goals of qualitative research are to, "develop sensitizing concepts, describe multiple realities, evolve grounded theory and develop understanding" (Bogdan and Biklen, p. 41), then it would seem important to ascertain the extent to which the outcomes resulting from the pursuit of such goals had meaning for adult learners in the study, and elsewhere.

In Chapter 3, I outlined in detail my methodology for Cycle 8. Here I shall summarise key outcomes, particularly checks with study participants, and then, more generally, with other adult learners.

2. Some examples of outcomes from Cycle 8

2.1. With study participants

My interview with Karen and Sally (8i) about the journal article and the written and verbal responses to the autumn 1989 package (8ii) suggested that what I had written seemed to capture key dimensions relating to the influences of prior learning on adults' expectations and experiences of returning to formal learning contexts.

For example, Sally said the article had deepened her understanding of her own experience, putting into clearer perspective some of the struggles she had had at university. She felt I had helped her to understand better why the experience of being a learner at Hillcroft felt very different from that at university. She said it may help lecturers to get away from making the mistake of dismissing the feelings of mature students with comments like, "Those women, moaning again." (17/4/88)

She spoke about how surviving disjunction in higher education, and learning how to manage what she describes as the "baptism of fire" gives you, "a strength and purpose" to take into the 'working world' with you. (26-10-89) She likened students to sheep, and lecturers to shepherds, all bashing towards fences, unable to stop for those who fall down. She also elaborated on the theme of particularly middle class people being better prepared to 'play the game', drawing on her own and her husband's experiences of returning to formal learning contexts: "If you're working class and leave school at 15, you haven't learned that game and when you are expected to do something outside that experience, you just panic. I can't do this!." (12-4-88)

She enclosed a poem by Robert Graves which she felt captured the essence of the disjunction-integration theme: "In Broken Images". I had not previously encountered this poem, but was struck by the power and succinctness with which it captured the essence of difference and disjunction. I was also moved by her choice of response. (Appendix 52)

Similarly, at our interview, Karen greeted me by saying that she had been away and had only received her copy of the article the night before our meeting. She said she had stayed up until 3am. reading it over and over again, and writing her thoughts down in her diary:

Field record: "You've expressed all that I've been struggling with over the past year, but I didn't know how to find the words to describe what I've been feeling. It's just all there. It's depressing in a way. WHY IS THAT? That these feelings are so widespread. But encouraging in another, that it's not just you."
(Interview notes, 12/4/88)

Karen responded particularly to Darcy's comments in the journal article: "I generate the learning as well as receive it" She commented, "That is really true, but I need space to be able to [do that]. " She also commented on Diane's remark about feeling capable before going into HE: "That could be me! In all areas of my life. Except for intellectual need. But I begin to doubt [at university] if I'm intellectually capable. Starts to erode at me." (12-4-88) Our discussion led once again to reflections on her writing block, and it was through this interview that the complexity of dynamics that seem to silence or open up especially women as learners surfaced. Once again, I had to confront the inadequacy of my previous explanations based on progressive methodologies. I had only recently encountered the theme of women finding a voice in the work of Belenky et al(1986): something to which Karen's story brought great meaning. As she said, "Maybe that's what I don't accept. That what I see is valid!"

Similarly, in her written responses to the draft of the final analysis, Karen spoke about the meaningfulness of the disjunction-integration formulation for her:

Field record: "All in all I think it reads beautifully. (...) I particularly like your very clear use of the terms 'disjunction' and 'integration' and your analysis is so piercing. You just seem to divine exactly what's being said. Do I get to see the whole thing at some point?" (Letter accompanying written response to draft of final analysis, November 6, 1988)

She writes in her notes about, "whole integration depends very largely on being seen as a person rather than a student/pupil. (...) " She shares what my writing has triggered for her about relationships being the most important thing and her struggles at university with issues of identity, isolation in learning, and wavering confidence. She recalls once again her memories of her A level tutor, who, "just took it as read that I would be able to understand, even the maths. She seemed to think I was intelligent, capable. (...) I was amazed, excited, more determined. If she saw this ability, maybe it was true and how come I didn't see it. Her classes/attitude acted as a sort of 'injection of confidence the whole two years I was there. I'm still in touch with her. Is this something to do with her responding to me as a person: appreciating an outside-the-academic life?" (Appendix 53)

The themes of learning in-relation, 'feeling capable' as a result of particular kinds of relationships, women's silencing, of learner identity and possibility, and a deeper understanding of the conditions conducive to generating a sense of integration or disjunction with regard to learner identity and possibility all became sharpened as the result of the various personal and written Cycle 8 exchanges with Karen and Sally.

Peter (Appendix 54) wrote back his agreement that 'social relationships' and 'climate' are "very important to whether disjunction or integration occurs." He said how he liked my emphasis

on research, "with people, not on them. Very well put over." He made comments about how the 'work looks very good' and 'very interesting.' He also re-emphasised a point from his interview about the mutual responsibility of staff and students to use resources for education effectively, and maintaining a "positive and happy atmosphere." He self-deprecatingly comments on his urge to structure it all, acknowledging what, "a middle class male control fiend I am."

Jane (Appendix 55) spoke more personally, talking about how reading the transcript, "brought back some very powerful memories." She reflects on their festering impact after all these years and how they still manifest themselves, leaving her, "highly dependent upon the reactions of those around me" - something that I recognised as a recurring theme in association with persistent experiences of disjunction. She had changed her career entirely, taking a cut in pay and having to begin as an apprentice trainee. She had also abandoned her M.A. course, having lost interest, "and the course no longer seemed relevant - either vocationally or in terms of personal development." She commented that having left education, she finds it "easier to accept learning as something which is broader than classroom experience, and includes social development." Jane made notes on each chapter, often saying how she agreed, or 'that's me!'. She raised some questions about the social class emphasis on, for example, learning at home vs school, and queried whether she had narrowed her meanings for learning to mine at the time of the interview.

This was interesting to me, since at the beginning of the study, I had not really considered learning in the terms that many Cityside adults used, in recalling their experiences of learning at school and at home. This was one of the reasons why I deliberately had sought out middle class professional people in Cycle 2. My purposeful sampling decision seemed to have been a valid one. I also felt confident that I had consistently encouraged people to speak about learning in broad senses. Jane, however, as well as my supervisor, helped me to be more tentative in summarising outcomes in relation to social class.

She concluded by reflecting on her experience of her B.Ed: the course she went on after becoming a parent, and which she felt had compensated considerably for the impact a previous sense of disjunction at school had had on her self-esteem. She described this as having been characterised by, "complete sense of integration with my environment." She uses the term, 'oneness': And I support your assertions, too (...) that relationships are one of the most important factors in that sense of integration." She closed with , "Good luck with your thesis, it is very interesting and a really worthwhile study."

Connie (Appendix 56) chose to write only on the transcript, offering lengthy reflections from her considerably changed time and situational perspective. Her comments indicated a great deal of re-vision (Rich, 1972) since we had last met four years before. It seemed that she was coming to terms with how much she had internalised about her role as a woman, and how this related to some of the disjunction she was experiencing at the time of our interview. She begins her comments with, "It's like reading about another person. I've moved on so much since this interview. Maybe my notes will allow you to see how. " She also emphasises the working class dimension to her identity, something that had been less at issue for her when we met, and which she had considered more from the position of her middle class life style. She continually relates these new understandings to what she calls the dominant educational paradigm. She writes,

Field record: "[Issues [of] class/race/gender are causal relationships re disjunction within education. [...] The educational system is an important aspect of maintaining the power of class/race/gender control. The question I would raise is what part does disjunction play within the perspective of societal control over these groups? Perhaps when this is questioned/looked at then one can look at the educational system with a view to change." (Written responses to draft of final analysis, November, 1988) (Appendix 56 provides some sample pages from her annotated transcript)

Godfrey, whom I bumped into during the autumn of 1989, was pleased to be back in touch. His busy schedule, however, prevented him from doing little more than telephoning a general response. He felt he could relate to most of what I had written, although he queried my comment in the journal article (by now in published form) about his contribution to 'staff development' at Cityside being welcomed: "Only by a few." He explained that he was moving towards the final stages of his PhD, and would welcome "a long talk about all these things sometime."

Fortunately, I was able to track down Janice and Bill through Godfrey, they having since been married. She was pleased to hear from me, and was interested to hear how the study had developed. She commented on how long ago it felt, especially since she now had two small children, in addition to her 11 year old from her previous marriage. She explained that, what with working full time, she had little time, but she would be pleased to help in any way. I sent her the package, accompanied by transcript and article, and we arranged a time to speak. She planned to discuss it with Bill, and share their responses. When I telephoned, she was up to her neck in children and crises, so we arranged another time to speak. Again, this proved impossible. She therefore could only comment generally saying: "It's great, really. But I just haven't had time to respond in detail. But none of it seems irrelevant. In fact, it brought back a lot of memories, not all good." She explained that Bill too had been keen to read it, but had not had time. She urged me to visit sometime, when I was in her area, offering at the same time another day on which to ring. I was reluctant, however, to put any more pressure on her, so I said her general comment was sufficient, and I too hoped to see her someday.

Finally, Ethel (Appendix 57) wrote in very personal terms, reflecting fluidly over six pages on her experiences at school, her return to formal education, and in turn, on the learning of the mentally handicapped young woman whom she had since fostered from a long-term hospital. She too caused me to modify and reflect again on some of the too clear cut distinctions conveyed by the draft of the final

analysis, in response to her comments about the, "sharp line drawn between formal learning settings" and "lifelong learning settings" by the middle class people. I regard these as different but complementary. " As such, she helped to give rise to a more differentiated analysis in Chapter 7. She makes connections between her experience of abuses of power in the educational system, and in the subnormality hospital: "The denigration of another human being as a ~~s~~top to one's ego is hardly a very laudable characteristic!" (p. 4, written response to draft of final analysis, (October, 1988) She responded to a reflective note embedded in the transcript of our interview: namely that I interpreted her slipping back into a Cockney accent as a compliment:

Field record:"You are correct, your Americanness is an advantage. (...)I suggest that you trusting us sufficiently to drop your guard is the secret of your very successful and extremely interesting study. At a guess, I would say that your subjects were far more honest with you than they might have been with other researchers. You are correct. My Cockney is normally reserved for my own people! " ((p. 4, written response to draft of final analysis." (October, 1988)

Therein lay some human validation for how the reliability of data can be enhanced through effective interactions, and the advantages of the 'human instrument', as discussed by Lincoln and Guba.(1985) Ethel concludes by reflecting on the learning of her new foster daughter, Sarah: "If Sarah can pull her socks a little way up her foot, people like me can get a degree (...)There will be no changes in attitude at the bottom until there is radical change in attitude at the top." (p. 6)

2.2. With other adult learners

The final three 'credibility and meaningfulness checks' enabled me to appreciate just how much the meaning can be conveyed through peoples' stories, not abstract formulations. It was all too easy to slip into the latter, as well as to theoretical language, in ways

that became detached from the power and impact of peoples' actual experience, or made the meanings of such experiences feel inaccessible. In other words, paradoxically, I had to guard against generating further disjunction for certain students in the very ways in which I spoke about the study and its outcomes. Overall, the encounter with the mature students on the university course, and ex-Hillcroft students, heightened my sensitivity to complexities in the data, while making me more cautious about my use of language to describe the study's process and outcomes.

On each occasion, a number of individuals made a point of sharing with me the impact that my talk or my 1988 article had had on them personally. For example, the visit to the university began with a male student on the course greeting me and buying me a cup of coffee. Once he sat down, he launched immediately into saying how interesting he found my article: " Rang many bells. Hard to believe that an academic can understand things like that - no disrespect, mind you! Encouraging though." (Field notes, April, 1989) He explained how he had left school at 16 with no qualifications, and how here he was almost 20 years later doing an M.A. He had found the sessions very painful, and talked about the silencing he had experienced.

Just before the seminar, a woman came up to me and said that she wanted to tell me straight away that my article was, "the most important thing that has happened to me on this course. " She explained that she had been sitting on top of the bus this morning, near to crying and wanting to pull down the window and shout, "This woman understands! She really understands what I've been going through. " (Field notes, April, 1989) I was totally silenced by this, really not knowing how to begin to respond, so overwhelmed I was by the power with which she spoke. I then said that she had just validated in ways that were far more meaningful to me than the qualification itself all that I had invested personally in this study over the past six years.

At the end of the workshop, during which a considerable amount of pain and struggle associated with the course was explored in ways that seemed to empower those who were present, one of the Black men came up to me and said that until this seminar, he had never thought about how his earlier learning linked to what he was experiencing on the course. He explained how he wanted to follow up some of the issues which had arisen for him during the session, but "not with people on this course." He also thanked me for affording him the opportunity to share how he was feeling with another Black person on the course. This had been the first time they had spoken, and it helped to, "explain a lot of things."

A considerable amount of discussion was devoted at this seminar as to when disjunction could become the starting point for significant learning, as opposed to "paralysis"; what kinds of situations seemed to be associated with it; what kinds of relationships and conditions helped to support the move out of disjunction towards significant learning; and how much could learners do themselves to handle situations in academic settings characterised by considerable disjunction. The need for space to reflect on the experience of learning itself as part of academic programmes was identified as essential. One woman found the courage to say to her tutor that the reason she had not been attending the course sessions for the past year was not due to family and work pressures, as she had said (not wanting to hurt his feelings), but rather because the atmosphere in the group and on the course was so "awful I just didn't want to be part of that." This caused several other women to describe how silenced they had felt by certain circumstances on the course.

As rich a tapestry of responses to the study were generated at the Hillcroft seminar, where, once again I was confronted with many memories and responses triggered by my sharing of particular 'life stories' and key themes arising from the study. There, in a large and predominately middle-class audience, there was a great deal of anxiety about discussing social class in relation to education. This raised many still unresolved questions for me about whether and how to

address the complex interrelatedness of certain dimensions of learner experience arising from the study in such forums. I acknowledged the need to pose such issues as question marks, rather than as full stops: respecting the often complex and contradictory ways in which personal biography can interweave with social history. There was a great deal of discussion about women learning with other women, and then making the transition to other kinds of contexts. A very powerful exchange occurred between the one man present, another speaker and a Ruskin College alumnus, and a woman who had gone from Hillcroft to Ruskin. What became evident was that as learners, two different worlds had been experienced. For him, the cut and thrust of intellectual debate at Ruskin had been a continual source of stimulation. For her, she recalled this as rough, silencing and hard work all the time. I was struck by how I could hear the differences in the meanings that were being conveyed, recognising how 5 years previously I would have missed their respective nuances altogether.

Finally, in the third check for meaningfulness and credibility, 'D' (Appendix 58) wrote to me, based on his reading of Part III, that,

Field record: "Your conclusion chapter clarifies different layers of the struggles I've been involved in during the past years, and even, if I reflect deeper, during my lifetime. Many of my former learning experiences, as a working class kid, were characterised by similar circumstances of disjunction which you describe so well in your work in relation to the formal educational system."

He coaxed further forward my still tentative but emergent view that education, at its best, is genuinely a dialogue that is not about, "leading people towards the 'right' interpretation or reframing of their past experiences":

Field record: " (...)you help me to reassert that education [...] should predominately be concerned with (...) understanding the assumptions/self-evident life-world of both teachers and learners, parents and children, trainers and trainees, activities and

participants. You make me understand in a better way that education has little to do with the search for the magic formula that will turn the learners into more self-directed, independent, integrated or whatever persons, but very much with a dialogical renaming (decoding and recoding) of the social constructed reality in which we live. "(Written responses to Part III of thesis, July, 1989)

3. Gains from Cycle 8

These checks had a significant influence upon the development of the analysis and the final stages of the thesis itself. Overall, they were critical in helping me to let go finally of certain tenacious holds on previous assumptions: for example, that 'progressive methodologies' hold the 'key', that gender is tangential rather than central to the experience of being a learner and that the nature of the relationship and the dialogue between teacher and learner is not merely a matter of skills development. Salmon's argument that traditionally, teaching and education have been defined in terms that fail to include the learner (1988), developed a great deal more meaning for me. Although these new ways of understanding the situation of adult learners had been gradually coaxed to life throughout the study as the result of systematically listening to and making sense of many adults' stories, nonetheless, the interactions involved in these checks for meaningfulness and credibility helped to accelerate and consolidate the re-structuring of my own conceptual frameworks. I became more conscious of just how many assumptions, beliefs and perceptions had shifted as a result of the study. I also felt affirmed in certain initial orientations: for example, that it was worthwhile learning more about adults' meanings for, and experiences of, learning outside education; that it was equally important to focus on what being a learner had meant personally, not merely learning outcomes, as in previous studies discussed in Chapter 1. At the same time, however, critical reflection on myself forced me to confront and question why certain blinkers persisted, and to wonder what ones remained at the

edges of my thresholds of perception. In doing so, I began to identify areas for future inquiry.

The responses each 'check' gave rise to, helped me to trust fragile and new conceptual frameworks that until then had felt tentative and risky, not yet fully assimilated. In particular, cycle 8i and ii involved me in further developing relationships with the learners who had participated in the study. I was jarred into recognising the value of prolonged or repeated engagements, since the scaffolding of meaning derived from our previous encounter(s) was considerably enriched by subsequent ones. I resolved that this dimension would be central to my future research activities. But overall, an altogether different way of making sense of the situation of adult learners was helped to take shape. Each encounter gave rise to fresh insights into the data, and stimulated reflections on my own experience, and myself as the researcher, from new angles. Perhaps most importantly, these processes helped me to value what I had done. I felt affirmed in the richness of the data, the fruitfulness of the interpretations I was putting forward and how I had chosen to do so, from my own personal stance. (Salmon, 1989)

These final checks for meaningfulness and credibility also suggested the endpoints for this study, and brought into view possibilities for theoretical and philosophical elaborations of the disjunction-integration/learner identity formulations to be pursued in future. In addition, I felt confirmed in the scope for developmental activity based on the study, with students and staff alike. I had begun to identify by this stage new research activities, upon which I suddenly felt keen to embark.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) talk about how one knows that an end to a period of research can be drawn:

"The continual intermeshing of data collection and analysis has direct bearing on how the research is brought to a close. When the researcher is convinced that his [sic] conceptual framework forms a systematic theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of

the matter studied, that it is couched in a form which is possible for others to use in studying a similar area, and that he can publish the results with confidence, then he has neared the end of his research...Why does the researcher trust what he knows?..They are his [sic] perceptions, his personal experiences, his hard won analyses. A field worker knows, not only because he has been in the field, and how our intervention can be used for good or ill and because he has discovered and carefully generated hypotheses, but also because 'in his bones' he feels the worth of his final analysis."

However, like the women in this study, and that of Belenky et al (1986), I needed to affirm the worth of the final analysis in-relation-with others, not in isolation. Trusting my bones was not enough. But through and with others, I did feel affirmed, and more confident that I could now put forward some implications arising from this study before moving on. It is to this task that I next turn.

PART III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

PART III

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1. Introduction

1.1. Review

I began this research with the question:

"Do prior experiences of learning, within and outside formal education, have a bearing on adults' expectations and experiences of returning to formal learning contexts, and if so, in what ways?"

This research focus was underpinned by particular preoccupations and assumptions. I began with a concern to make sense of anomalies in my own experience as an adult educator and as someone who, herself, had been a mature student, after changing countries, and a long gap away from any formal study.

My review of the literature on adults returning to higher education conveyed little about how they gave meaning to their experiences, and nothing about how these meanings may have been shaped by lifelong learning, within and outside formal education. Moreover, the voices of students who, by virtue of their age, as well as their social and educational background, remain under-represented in higher education, were equally under-represented in existing literature.

The methods and epistemological assumptions associated with a qualitative approach were considered most appropriate to exploring the substantive area for the study. I was committed to deepening understanding, raising questions, and illuminating complexities and anomalies, rather than testing hypotheses, developing generalised laws, or prediction and control.

Data collection began with the stories of non-traditional students at an urban polytechnic, 'Cityside'. These adults had been outside formal education for at least five years. In terms of age, gender, social class, race and prior educational experience, they were representative of the kinds of adults on whom, as was demonstrated in the literature review presented in Chapter 1, access concerns have focused in recent years, and whose numbers remain disproportionately low in U.K. higher education.

As discussed in Chapter 3, I proceeded inductively, striving to remain alert to the voices and perspectives of adults different from myself, and listening for, "the unheard and unimagined." (Belenky et al, 1986). Themes emerging from the Cityside adults' stories provided the basis for the overall 'emergent research design' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), involving eight cycles overall. Purposeful sampling strategies and continual data analysis influenced the focus and purposes of each cycle, as detailed in Chapter 3, Section 4.

The outcomes that have formed the basis for Part II were most influenced by the individual interviews with 35 learners. They were able to speak in more depth than those seen only in group interviews. They spoke from the perspective of being a student on a particular higher education course (or its equivalent). The key participants in the study explored meanings and experiences of being a learner in different kinds of learning situations, within and outside formal education, over the course of their life times. Group interview and discussion material, and some written information, provided additional perspectives on emergent themes. Discussion was offered throughout, through both voice 1 and voice 2.

1.2. Overview of Part III

I will begin by summarising key themes and outcomes arising from this essentially exploratory study, as they were presented and discussed in each of the five chapters offered in Part II. I shall focus on what Marshall (1986) refers to as the, 'wholes and processes', all the

while respecting that, "these are statements for now, but may change. It is always tempting to over-invest in theories, to make them more certain and enduring than they sensibly can be."

I shall then introduce some caveats and limitations, setting a frame for the discussion and consideration of the implications of the study, within the context of current concerns to widen access to British higher education for more and different students. These concerns have been intensified since I began the study in 1983. In the course of considering the contribution made by this study, I shall address relationships with more recent work, and identify future directions for inquiry that now beckon. I shall conclude by reflecting on how the process of this research journey has challenged and changed the way I think about adults as learners, and the way I think of myself.

Whereas until now I have adopted two voices to chart the story of the research, along with critical reflection on emergent themes in relation to my own story, now the voices can be merged. I am concerned to convey the sense of integration I feel as a result of being in a new place, and now able to move on, all the while aware that new possibilities for disjunction and further learning loom on the horizon.

2. Summary of key themes

2.1. An emergent formulation: disjunction and integration involving questions of identity

Below I shall review key themes which derive from the experiences of adults in particular kinds of learning situations. Their stories have given meaning to the emergent formulation of disjunction and integration, which has been shown to involve questions relating to identity.

I have offered this formulation of 'disjunction and integration' as a way of thinking about the situation of adult learners and influences

of their lifelong learning upon their expectations and experiences of returning to formal learning contexts. My concern has been not to suggest that these terms have a universal validity. Instead, they have provided an axis of meaning for considering the complexities that have emerged from the accounts and for organising my observations and outcomes from the final cross-case, cross-contextual analysis. As such, others may have come up with another way of interpreting themes and meanings in these adults' stories.

At the core of the disjunction-integration formulation has emerged the notion of 'learner identity', as something which is,

"lodged not only privately within ourselves [but has] been built up through our dealings with other people: it is jointly constituted and has its reality in their experience too. "
(Salmon, 1988, p. 123)

'Learner identity' has been shown in Part II to incorporate both personal and social dimensions of identity. It is perhaps worth mentioning that I have evolved a usage of the term, 'identity', as a pragmatic and heuristic tool, rather than as a signpost to any particular literature or as a means of distinguishing one body of theory and research (such as that which focuses on the 'self') from another. To the best of my knowledge, the notion, 'learner identity' is not present in any existing literature.

In this section, I shall summarise the key themes which derive from the stories of adults in this study, and the kinds of lifelong learning influences that seem to have had an impact on their experience of returning to a formal learning context, after a break from any such situation for at least three years. I shall organise this summary under the five headings which framed the analysis presented in Part II:

Learning during the school years

Adults' expectations and meanings of learning outside formal education.

Becoming a mature student: making and anticipating the change.

Adults' experiences of formal learning contexts

Cycle 8: Checking for credibility and meaningfulness of the final analysis

2.2. Learning during the school years

Study participants' recollections of learning during the school years illuminated the extent to which particular purposes, meanings and expectations for learning at home and at school can place questions of identity at issue for certain learners from the outset of their interactions with school. A number of learners conveyed a strong sense of fragmentation in the ways they spoke about being a learner outside education, as against being a learner at school. A sense of fragmentation, of feeling somehow put at risk, is central to the notion of 'disjunction', as it has been used throughout this study. In contrast, an 'all of a piece' feeling was distinctive in other kinds of accounts. In other words, in some adults' recollections, there was a noticeable absence of emphasis on experiences that gave rise to a sense of feeling personally undermined by what was expected and assumed in the school environment. It is in this context that the notion of 'integration' as equilibrium was given meaning.

Experiencing, managing and mediating the school/life boundary was seen to feel problematic for some learners, and less so for others. Reading and maths were often identified as sites for struggle. Such struggles seemed to centrally involve questions about who one was in that particular situation, and could put home-school meanings for learning at the core of the struggle.

Working class adults in particular cited concerns with lack of relevance, describing often how their lived experience felt at odds with school-constructed knowledge. Similar disjunctions were described in relation to the emphasis on abstract learning as superior to

practical learning; on individual structured learning for achievement as against collective modes of learning through being and working together. When one type of learning was felt to be at odds with that which was emphasised at home, adults conveyed the sense that something about the person they had come to know themselves to be was being jarred.

The role that relationships with particular teachers could play in mediating a sense of disjunction came across as vital. Certain teachers and learning situations were recalled as having contributed to or undermined a learner's self-esteem and sense of possibility. Certain kinds of relationships were described, however, which seemed to compensate for the disjunction that could be experienced elsewhere in classes, or more generally in terms of an overall relationship with school as opposed to home and community. A number spoke about how they lurched from feeling capable in one situation with one teacher, to feeling rebellious, difficult, and incapable with another. Teachers were recalled generally as having the power to raise or lower the barometer of these adults' expectations of themselves when they were young, and indeed, to define 'who they were' as learners.

Surprisingly, however, seldom more than one or two teachers stood out as 'good' for adults looking back, across all of the accounts. Regardless of social background, similar meanings for 'good teachers' were also conveyed. The essence of these accounts is that the teacher seemed to care enough to make it matter to do well, and stimulated a sense of personal involvement. In such situations, learners often spoke about 'feeling capable'. But such teachers were recalled by the majority in this study as too few and far between, their compensating influence often being experienced as 'too little, too late'.

Teachers were also strongly associated with how working class people described the development of their own sense of their class identity. Stories about teachers' attacks on accents, and on other kinds of differences they perceived in the home backgrounds of certain

students (e.g. 'If your mothers work, there is no hope for you) were not uncommon in working class adults' accounts. A sense of regret, and sometimes anger, was often conveyed in such stories.

Some teachers were recalled as being able to enter into the learner's world, to provide a bridge, whereby the two learning spheres of home and school felt connected. Such experiences were recalled as immensely important, particularly when they helped to compensate for an overall sense of disjunction in relation to the school environment. Certain teachers afforded the opportunity for learners whose self-esteem had been systematically undermined, to experience an alternative reality. A hint of possibility, about themselves as learners, and for some, a kind of validation of something that they recalled as knowing not otherwise to have been recognised, was read retrospectively into such experiences. Such interactions were recalled as having indicated that who they were coming to know themselves to be, in the context of school, was not 'carved in granite.' It is likely that, given that these adults had since returned to formal education and proven their ability to benefit and succeed, such situations would stand out particularly, when thinking back to what it meant to be a learner in different kinds of situations.

Such situations were rare in the accounts of working class adults' recollections of learning during the school years. Most significant and meaningful learning was remembered as occurring outside school, with family and friends. Meaningful moments within school, moreover, seldom seemed sufficient to compensate for the overall sense of disjunction that was experienced. As such, most left school with few or no qualifications, concerned to be away from the source of so much disjunction.

For those whose learner identity was put at risk, at home or at school, regardless of social background, the need for consistent external affirmation was recalled as strong. Those adults conveyed a sense of having been without a rudder during these school years:

easily buffeted about by all sorts of undermining forces with few mediating influences to compensate.

The accounts from some learners, however, suggested that, largely those who had identified themselves as coming from middle-class backgrounds, during the early school years, developed a great deal of resilience and self-esteem. Although particular teachers might have temporarily undermined this, there was little sense of their feeling as if they as people, and their destinies, were being shaped by the power and impact of school experiences. Such learners spoke about the mediating influences of their home environments. An implicit understanding of 'place' within the social hierarchy, reinforced by explicit messages from teachers, parents and friends, also seemed to be at work.

The themes of individual accountability for failure, however, were most present in those who conveyed a strong sense of integration in terms of their learner identity in relation to school and home, and who saw themselves as middle class. The stories of this group conveyed a 'taken-for-grantedness' about the lack of relevance between school and life. It seemed that for certain adults, even when in retrospect they could recognise this as giving rise to some sense of disjunction, they regarded it as unproblematic: as something that they had learned not to question. For such learners, the experience of such disjunctions did not seem to place questions about who they were at the core of their experience as a learner.

In conclusion, some learners' relationships and experiences of learning at home gave rise to a sense of integration, and some fundamental and continuous sense of who they were at home and at school. On the other hand, school brought others into contact with different kinds of relationships, where different assumptions and purposes for learning adhered, and where who they had come to know themselves to be, felt under threat, either implicitly or explicitly. An inherent sense of fragmentation in these adults' sense of learner identity was recalled to have undermined the extent to

which they had felt willing and able to enter into a particular formal learning situation, when there few mediating influences at home or in that environment. Those whose experience of school and of school in relation to home and community seemed characterised largely by disjunction in most cases had identified themselves as working class.

2.3. Adults' expectations and meanings of learning outside formal education

For some, largely middle class adults, learning outside formal education was regarded as 'second best' and insignificant. Although they may have engaged in stimulating work, organised activities, adult education classes, and the challenge of raising children, these experiences were recalled as not really 'counting as learning'. Their experience of being away from formal education seemed, however, associated with a sense of equilibrium, although once again, the theme of identity was central. For such adults, their meanings about what counted as learning, and 'being a learner' seemed inextricably interwoven with achievement in formal education. These adults tended to move in and out of formal education, and other kinds of structured learning activity (such as choir, dancing, riding, short courses) quite freely throughout their lives. But their sense of learner identity seemed determined largely by the formal education system, and it was there that they sought affirmation through individual achievement.

There were others for whom learning outside formal education was all part of the rich fabric of their lives in which being an active and self-directed learner was central. This group was also largely middle class and/or professional. It incorporated several adults (e.g. Derek and Sheila) who had spoken about their years at school with explicit reference to their working class background. Their learning, whether it occurred inside or outside education, seemed to be determined largely by needs, interests and aspirations at a given moment. These learners conveyed a sense of learner identity that seemed lodged

almost entirely within themselves and their own lifelong learning activities, however and wherever they occurred: at home, at work, through self-managed study, through the pursuit of leisure interests, in personal or professional development groups, or through education. These adults conform to the normative picture painted of adult learners as, 'self-directed lifelong learners' in so much of the literature, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Adults whose stories suggested either of the above two patterns nonetheless seemed to share in common a sense of learner identity that extended to include the possibility of formal education. This was not the case with the next two groups, whose meanings and experiences of learning and being a learner outside formal education seemed to differ.

Those women who worked largely inside their homes for many years or in low-paid, low-status jobs, learning outside spoke about being in 'dead end' situations that had gradually eroded their confidence and sense of self-esteem. A non-existent sense of learner identity was suggested by many accounts. Their definition of who they were was tied up in their roles and relationships, and there seemed to have been little sense of personal possibility in relation to formal education. Rather than the sense of equilibrium suggested by those for whom learning outside seemed 'second best', a kind of disjunction was suggested in relation to their experiences of learning and being a learner outside formal education. These women often spoke about their relationships with home and family, however much they had personally invested in these, as if they did not really count in terms of 'being a person' in the world at large. They implied this to mean: being seen by others to be of value, with intelligence and something distinctive to offer in their own right. For many women, the experience of parenting was not seen as 'significant learning' and as such, they described their gradually diminishing confidence and self-esteem. Many of these adults, unlike the first group, did not seem to consider formal education as an option for fulfilling these

needs, or for compensating for the disjunctions they were experiencing at home.

For some in this latter group, and a significant group of others, who worked largely in low-paid or low-status jobs after leaving school, it was through other kinds of learning experiences - what I termed 'discovery experiences' - that a sense of learner identity was generated. The experiences recounted had meaning in the context of their previous experiences at school, and their own lives. In all cases, accounts of these discovery experiences came from adults who had described experiencing a strong sense of disjunction throughout most of the period of learning during the school years. Any sense of learner identity and possibility associated with school, seemed to have been systematically undermined. It was therefore outside school that they achieved their own sense of learner identity, and evolved their own meanings about what it meant 'to learn'.

Overall, accounts of discovery experiences conveyed almost an enhanced sense of integration: a heightened sense of affirmation and validation, of personal involvement and excitement, and of identity. For some, discovery entailed a great deal of pain and struggle, and was often tied up with some kind of personal crisis, such as changing countries, being admitted to psychiatric hospital, redundancy, or confronting what it meant to be a woman or be Black in this society. For others, discovery was the outcome of fortuitous circumstances, with each experience giving rise to a sense of possibility and often for the first time, a sense of integration as a learner. The momentum of self-development, often associated with discovery experiences, could also create another kind of disjunction for women, whose partners could easily feel threatened by their growing confidence.

In all cases, the discovery experiences seemed to do two things. On the one hand, it was suggested that they significantly compensated for prior experiences at school, which in all cases had been characterised by an overall sense of disjunction and uncertainty about if and whether they belonged in that learning environment. On the

other hand, by virtue of the confidence, self-esteem, and sense of learner identity that resulted from such experiences, these adults conveyed a sense of building up a 'special reserve, which enabled them to take greater and greater risks. They tentatively edged towards learning situations which they had been 'taught' at school were not for them. They began to contemplate the possibility of returning to formal education, if they were fortunate enough to come upon information that enabled them to feel that this option was open to them - in spite of their previous educational background.

Once again, the vital role of relationships is conveyed. Discovery almost always entailed particular kinds of interactions with another, or others, who stimulated a sense of personal involvement or personal validation, that provided an oasis for repair and the rebuilding of confidence.

Perhaps most significantly, those who experienced significant discoveries about themselves as learners outside the system, associated what it meant to learn with particular kinds of processes and relationships, not with a particular place. This was later shown to be significant.

2.4. Becoming a mature student: Making and anticipating the change

The first theme addressed in the analysis of adults' accounts of anticipating and making the change to becoming a mature student was that of orientation. Some stories suggested a 'moving away' theme; others a clear sense of 'moving towards'.

As suggested above, there were some whose sense of learner identity and possibility extended to formal education and equally, there were those for whom this was not the case. The former group's return to a formal learning context tended to be marked by a clear sense of moving 'towards' something: a job opportunity or new career direction they expected to result, or the kind of personal fulfillment they believed would emerge as a result of pursuing a particular interest in

a particular way. Re-entry for this group was characterised by a great deal of care and consideration of appropriate options in relation to what they perceived might best suit their own learning preferences, aspirations and interests. This group also tended to be middle class and/or professional.

For those whose sense of learner identity and possibility neither easily nor readily embraced the possibility of formal education, having come to believe that such an option was not, 'for the likes of them', their orientation came across to me as quite different. The return of these largely working class men and working and middle class women tended to come about more through serendipity, rather than conscious design and planning. Chance encounters with information about courses, combined with all sorts of fortuitous circumstances and often the encouragement of others, led to these adults 'falling into' returning situations. Their stories suggested that they had experienced a kind of culture shock about being accepted, hardly believing this had happened, so at odds it was with their own sense of learner identity. Their accounts conveyed a sense of a readiness to 'move away' from, or change, their circumstances and thus there was a willingness to go with the currents that had precipitated the return.

For some, working and middle class, and particularly those who had experiences associated with a sense of disjunction at school, making the transition, and being accepted, fuelled a determination to 'prove they could do it': not just to themselves, but to those 'remembered others' who had so systematically undermined their sense of identity as a learner at school.

Four patterns of re-entry were identified. For some, initial re-engagements with the formal system came through taking an O or A level course that had been heard about locally and often, that someone encouraged them to take. The case studies presented demonstrated the 'moving away' themes above and the extent to which the possibility of making the change can be easily undermined: by the adult's lack of

self-confidence, by bureaucratic obstacles, by an insensitive receptionist or interviewer.

The second pattern of return included other kinds of courses, such as returning to learning or training courses, where, by virtue of such experiences being characterised largely by integration, further options were considered and pursued.

In both of the above situations, a number of adults described 'discovery experiences' analogous to those recounted in Chapter 5. Often for the first time, the experience of learning in formal education was characterised by excitement and a sense of enhanced integration, rather than a sense of disjunction, or a kind of 'taken for granted' equilibrium. Such contrasting experiences in turn gave rise to often a new, for a few, a renewed, sense of learner identity and possibility. However tenuous this was, it seemed to help propel the learner forward into taking more risks with formal learning situations.

A third group of learners returned to higher education directly, after many years of no experience of any formal learning context. For those whose prior experiences of learning had been characterised largely by disjunction, direct entry returns seemed characterised by the greatest degree of serendipity.

Finally, there was a group to whom I referred as the professionals, who described an 'in and out' pattern in relation to formal education, since 'returning', and participation in all sorts of structured learning experiences, were a common pattern in their lives. Referring back to Chapter 5, this kind of continuing relationship with formal education was characteristic of both those who saw learning outside as second best, and those who saw learning outside as yet another dimension to lifelong learning. Apart from this pattern, no social class complexities seemed associated with the mode of returning.

Whatever the social background and pattern of return described by a study participant, all described anxiety and a loss of confidence in connection with anticipating and making the change. For those who defined learning largely in terms of formal education, failure and achievement seemed not about something that happened to them; these seemed to be experienced as something fundamentally about them. This too had been learned during initial schooling and as such, another dimension to learner identity was suggested. Others also suggested that returning entailed the risk that the confidence and sense of possibility developed through discovery outside formal education could be once again undermined within it. Others, all women, were all too conscious about how their return might fundamentally undermine their relationships with their partners. Some felt tremendous guilt about doing something for themselves, a familiar theme in the literature on women returning. (e.g. Martin, 1988). The stories of returning on the part of lifelong learners conveyed the most resilience.

Nonetheless, the words chosen to describe the feelings associated with making the transition were often similar, whatever the social or educational background. Anxiety, fear, concern about doing well and being liked were common themes. What gave the words impact, however, was their meaning within the context of a particular individual's story.

2.5. Adults' experiences of formal learning contexts

First encounters after a long break often entailed a great deal of 'sense making' in a new world. However, for some, where certain kinds of relationships and support obtained, a sense of integration was felt almost immediately. For others, whose identity was tied up with formal education, this world, and its expectations of them, was fairly familiar, and little disjunction was experienced. This did not mean that they did not feel a considerable amount of anxiety.

There were those whose initial education had been characterised overall by a sense of disjunction, and some described how it took some time to trust that their returning experience could possibly be different. There were others who experienced a sense of integration from the outset. Follow up interviews with a selection of study participants identified for some a re-surgence of disjunction in alternative higher education situations. In such cases, the sense of learner identity they had come to trust in one environment seemed to have been threatened in ways that re-awoke earlier memories of school or made them question the validity of their new found self-esteem.

For some, jarrings in the new setting were experienced as threatening, but challenging and exciting. They did not feel at risk as they had at school. Just as outside education, disjunction had been found by some to lead to significant learning and change in the context of supportive relationships, a similar situation could be experienced in the formal learning context. Alternatively, there were a number who experienced disjunction in ways that gave rise to the sense of fragmentation that was reminiscent of school, and experienced as disabling, rather than as potentially enabling. In such situations, who they were, in terms of their identity as a learner, as a person and sometimes, as a member of a particular social group, was being directly ignored, under-valued, or dis-respected.

Finally, for others, jarrings could be experienced in ways that did not involve or threaten them as people, but gave rise to questions about quality and standards at issue, and tarnished idealised images of higher education. There were a few whose accounts suggested the 'all of a piece', taken for granted acceptance of whatever came their way in formal education - a theme that had been characteristic across their life story.

There were striking patterns in the extent to which themes of difference, power and role disjunction were present or absent across the accounts. Whereas in accounts of initial education, identity in class terms was recalled as a central feature of adults' experience,

in accounts of returning, themes of gender, race and age figured more explicitly. It is in such accounts that the notion of learner identity as incorporating both personal and social dimensions was given further strength. The various ways in which differences and power relations were experienced in particular learning contexts illustrated how combined dimensions of identity could give rise to disjunction under certain conditions: for example, age and gender; class and age; race, gender, class and age. Many women described role conflicts in terms of who they were as students, partners, parents and friends.

In other accounts, it seemed that such dimensions of identity were explicitly valued and not to be felt under threat in the learning situation. For example, there were women who described the sense of continuity they felt between their experience of learning in a women's group, and their subsequent experiences of learning in formal education, each experiencing further compensation for previous experience at school. There were others for whom these dimensions seemed not at issue at all, suggesting perhaps a different meaning for integration. For example, a certain status quo in terms of how they saw themselves as learners, and what they expected of formal education and themselves, was not being dislodged. Prior meanings for learning, and assumptions about formal learning contexts, were further supported.

In accounts of experiences of the learning process, striking differences were in evidence across participants' accounts. These were often described in ways that conveyed the interpretative frameworks whereby different adults, and different social groups, were making sense of their experience. For example, women frequently spoke about how their assumptions about what 'learning together' meant could feel at odds with the assumptions that dominated in a particular learning context. Learning situations that demanded autonomy, competition and having to place relationships with others at risk, were shown to be associated with a sense of disjunction for a number of women. The three Black people^{interviewed at length} in the study spoke about how they always felt on guard in predominately white groups. Still others found

the ways in which tutors used their power a major source of disjunction. Some described their reactions to younger students, and concerns about their passive conformity to the status quo, were not infrequently expressed.

Moreover, weaving through the accounts was a theme relating to what knowledge was considered to be legitimate and what knowledge was considered illegitimate. Again, within the accounts of many of the middle class professionals, this aspect of learning in a more traditional academic learning context did not seem to be at issue in the same way as it was for others for whom being a learner comprised an explicit sense of themselves as women, as working class people, as Black people. As in the reflections about learning during the initial school years, for some people such experiences might have been registered as 'annoying' or 'frustrating'; for others, something about who they were as people felt placed at issue.

As in the accounts of learning during the initial school years, or outside formal education, relationships and the nature of the dialogue played a vital role in mediating quality for all. These dimensions of learner experience also played a critical role in mediating a sense of disjunction in other parts of a course, particularly, but not only, for those whose prior experiences of learning overall were characterised more by disjunction than integration, and whose sense of rudder remained precarious. Even adults who had developed tremendous resilience as learners, and had an orientation described as 'lifelong learners', spoke about the importance of relationships in enhancing the meaning and value of their learning experience. Participants spoke about alternative ways of experiencing differences and power relations in a formal learning context, in the context of particular kinds of relationships that had also given rise to a sense of integration, rather than disjunction.

Descriptions of changes experienced in connection with the return to the formal learning context suggested two patterns. On the one hand, there were those who felt a sense of integration because of the

circumstances of their situation as learners within that formal learning context. Others described positive gains in spite of these circumstances. The latter group often described explicitly seeking out compensating experiences, and opportunities to reflect with others on the disjunction they were experiencing. A number of adults, who had described themselves previously as almost totally dependent upon external affirmation to maintain their self-esteem and a sense of possibility as learners in their accounts of prior learning, conveyed a stronger sense of 'having a rudder' with which to withstand disjunction. This was particularly evident in the follow up interviews, suggesting, as in the case of discoveries outside formal education, that certain experiences create a 'special reserve' upon which adults can draw later. Follow up contacts with certain adults provided further evidence of a more resilient sense of learner identity that was better able to withstand prevailing winds and unforeseen obstacles. However, all of the women who were followed up still conveyed the extent to which they felt their sense of learner identity to be jointly constituted through their interactions with and relationships with others. Many accounts suggested how easily experiences characterised by disjunction could be internalised as a failure, or deficit in them, particularly in formal learning contexts where certain kinds of relationships and conditions figured. Opportunities to reflect on what they were experiencing with former classmates, with whom they once experienced a sense of integration, seemed vital to maintaining their resilience and sense of possibility as a learner in the new situation.

What was particularly interesting was the extent to which study participants' reflections on their gains from returning to a formal learning situation conveyed a sense of having developed meanings for learning, and a sense of identity as learners, akin to the 'lifelong learners' described in Chapter 5. Self-directedness and resilience, and an openness to learning experiences, wherever they occurred, were strongly suggested, particularly in the accounts of those who had experienced discovery, either prior to re-entry, or subsequently.

Chapter 7 concluded with 'advice to teachers'. The themes of dialogue and relationship, personal meaning and involvement, the impact of the personal stance of the teacher, interconnectedness and finding a voice - the latter two being at issue particularly for women - figured in these accounts. The interweaving of the 'cognitive and the social' (Salmon and Clare, 1984) is vividly conveyed, as these adults describe the conditions under which they most feel able, and willing to learn: conditions which give rise to a sense of integration, and a sense of personal involvement and challenge as learners.

2.6. Cycle 8: Checking for credibility and meaningfulness of the final analysis

There were three kinds of outcomes from these consultations, each representing a different dimension to the benefits of the process.

By discussing the draft of a journal article written during the early stages of final data analysis with Karen and Sally, themes emerging across life stories were given greater meaning, and in some cases, were taken forward. Their reflections helped to consolidate shifts in my own thinking that had been initiated through my involvement in this study. Specific illustrations of this process were offered.

Secondly, my re-engagements with study participants during this cycle helped me to address my question: are the outcomes, and the ways in which I have interpreted and organised them, meaningful and credible to those who contributed to their generation? This appeared to be the case, as evidenced by written responses. As discussed in Chapter 3, however, some questions remain unanswered about how others whom I was unable to follow up might have responded. The effort invested by people in making a response to what I sent them, however, and the distinctive nature of the written contributions suggested that my own stance, as a person and a researcher, may have helped to generate a particular quality of data. It seems viable to conclude at this stage that very different outcomes might have resulted, if I had adopted a more detached relationship or method of data collection. My

commitment to the values of doing research with, rather than on people, was thus affirmed.

Finally, I was concerned in Cycle 8 to discover if, and to what extent, the outcomes and my interpretation of them had personal meaning, in terms of other adults' lived experience as learners? Did the study fulfill goals of qualitative research: namely to illuminate and develop sensitising concepts that can facilitate a deeper understanding of complex social situations? Outcomes from these checks had a particular kind of power. In all cases, there seemed to be meaning and value to the disjunction-formulation, and the use of participants' life stories. Questions, however, were shown to have been raised for me and others about the complex interweavings of personal and social history, and how best to explore these in groups. How do we avoid falling into meaningless generalisations that do an injustice to the complexities entailed in individual's learning stories, or by virtue of the language used, generate a sense of disjunction that may result in miseducation. (Dewey, 1938; Jarvis, 1987a)

A seminar and workshop based on the processes and outcomes of the research seemed to empower people to appreciate better the complexity of their own and previous learning situations, and to analyse possibilities for their own action from new perspectives. In particular, the findings seemed particularly helpful to learners whose prior learning has increased the likelihood that they would internalise difficulties in a learning situation as indicative of deficits in their own intellect, motivation or character.

These checks for credibility and meaningfulness with adults who had not participated in the study suggested that there were many ways in which the outcomes of this study might be further elaborated, (theoretically and through further research). In addition, specific applications for the future were suggested, especially in work with students on whom access concerns are now focused especially.

In summary, Cycle 8 helped to highlight key aspects of what the outcomes of this study may offer to furthering understanding about the situation of adult learners on whom access concerns are now focused. Some specific themes were seen to have particular meaning: for example, the inadequacy of using teaching and learning methodologies as the explanation for certain difficulties experienced by adult learners; the impact of dominant power relations and socialisation patterns in society, and the extent to which they seem central rather than tangential to the experience of being a learner (this being illuminated by this study most clearly in relation to gender); the complex ways in which social and personal dimensions interweave with life history and particular kinds of interactions to curtail or enhance a sense of learner identity and possibility; the extent to which experiences characterised by particularly a sense of enhanced integration may create a special reserve upon which learners are able to draw in subsequent experiences where a sense of disjunction predominates; the situations in which disjunction may serve as a starting point for significant learning, rather than disempowerment; and the kinds of conditions that seem to be associated with experiences characterised by a sense of integration or disjunction, and the different meanings these experiences may have in the wider social context.

Overall, the outcomes of this study seem to have the potential to enable adult learners to make better sense of how prior learning experiences may have shaped their expectations and interpretations of particular kinds of learning situations at different times of their lives.

3. Constraints and caveats

My discussion of this study's key themes and outcomes, and their implications in the context of widening access to higher education must, I believe, begin with some caveats and a consideration of constraints upon any claims made on the basis of its outcomes.

The participants in my study were self-selected. They are all adults who have in fact performed well in traditional terms within formal, and particularly academic contexts. Therefore, they may themselves represent a kind of elite amongst those to whom wider access is now being offered. Moreover, more formal meanings for learning may have predominated, although I focused on experience and meanings for learning both inside and outside education. For this reason, it would be particularly useful to do a follow-up study of adults who have not returned to higher education and who are amongst those at whom access concerns are now targetted.

Women's voices predominate in this study, serving as the focus for four out of the eight cycles. Some of the issues they have raised have become clearer by addressing them from a gender-related perspective, and by reference to the growing sphere of feminist research and writing in relation to education with which I was previously unfamiliar. In addition, this research has considerably progressed, and indeed given new meaning to, my own development as a feminist: a dimension I have continued to keep explicit through the discussion provided through the second voice. But I did not set out to do a study of women. Moreover, constraints of time and design made it difficult to shift gears by the time I reached Cycle 7, at which time these patterns became sharper for me. So, although I address issues relating to women as learners to some extent in the discussion which follows, there have inevitably been some difficult boundary issues to manage, with respect to these dimensions of learner experience and references to other literature. In the end, I decided that, to do justice to some key themes in women's stories, and the complexities and controversies they raise, requires a second study. In such a study, I would set out explicitly to consider these issues exclusively with women. The latter would enable me to build on the work of those such as Belenky et al (1986), Lutrell (1989), Gilligan (1982) and Miller (1986) and address specific issues and questions which have arisen from this enquiry that have had such personal meaning and impact.

With regard to social class, in Chapter 3, I identified some of the difficulties entailed in its identification: whether through self-perception or by the Registrar General's categories. However, the strength with which this theme emerged from the Cityside participants - particularly in relation to initial schooling and learner identity - raised issues and questions which I felt I could not ignore in this study. As an 'outsider' to this culture, perhaps I was also more ready to pursue this as a question mark, inviting exploration, than I might have either in my own culture or were I British. In retrospect, I am glad I have kept social class as an explicit focus. By so doing, I believe I have gained access to meanings and dimensions of learner experience which might have remained (or been kept?) otherwise invisible. At the same time, throughout the analysis which has been presented, I have tried to convey the complexities of patterns relating to personal meanings of social class in relation to individuals' sense of their own learner identity and possibility, and formal education, and indeed how these change over time. In addition, I have continually shown how no categorisation is 'neat'. Indeed, it is the very messiness of self-perceived 'social class identity' in relation to what it means to learn and be a learner, and in relation to particular kinds of learning situations, that has been of value, as discussed previously. In particular, it has further illuminated complexities, contradictions and paradoxes in learners' experiences over time.

My feeling at the end of this study is that it is ^{more fruitful} to consider how and why self-esteem and an individual's sense of learner identity and possibility can become eroded or put at issue in certain learning environments. Aspects of social experience and identity that one person may take for granted may not be possible for others. I am committed to the value of focusing explicitly on how learners from particular social and educational backgrounds, differentially construct and interpret their experience. Perhaps we can then better resist the temptation to sanitise all experience into something that ignores either biography or wider social patternings at the expense of each other, as well as the other influences which mediate the

construction of personal and social meaning. Moreover, by acknowledging that there may be very different ways of constructing and interpreting the world, we can address what responsibilities are suggested on the part of institutions in a differentially structured and less elitist system of higher education. For example, we can address whether and how what is offered compensates for prior experiences characterised by disjunction; helps to (or continues to) build self-esteem and a sense of learner identity and possibility; and keeps alive the notion of discovery in learning. These issues, less than social class or gender per se - were what most concerned the learners in this study, as has been shown in Part II. And it is these issues on which I shall concentrate my energies in this discussion.

The accounts on which the analysis has been based have all been retrospective, therefore subject to blurrings of time past and to the sharp edges of time present. Each learner spoke from a particular situated perspective, and many at one fixed point in time. The notions of 'disjunction and integration' are themselves dynamic, indicative of a particular kind of interaction in particular kinds of circumstances involving particular kinds of players, who themselves bring a particular social past.

One way in which I addressed this situated/dynamic perspective tension, however, was to follow up Hillcroft women, and to re-cycle the final analysis to various participants. In this way, they could offer a different situated perspective on what had emerged not just from their earlier accounts, but also on their own current situation and themes emerging across the accounts as a whole.

I am also aware of having done only one depth interview, or a group interview, with many in this study. The lack of follow up with all, or at least a majority of participants, is inevitably a limitation. My own experience as a learner has been the focus of intense scrutiny throughout this research. Layers of onion skin, burying tacit knowledge and the effects of long forgotten experience about what it has meant to learn and be a learner in different situations, have

shed themselves one after another, never without struggle. Thus, the accounts offered here are not only influenced by an individual's dominant concerns at a particular point in time but also by their own levels of self-awareness. For many, our interview provided the first opportunity in their lives to reflect on what it had meant to learn, and be a learner, in different kinds of situations. This process in itself opened them up to new layers of experience and meanings that they too had forgotten or not known how to make sense of. Follow up contacts generated many more self-insights on the parts of participants, and consistently took my own thinking considerably further.

In retrospect, I believe even more would have been gained from more follow-up interviews. If I were doing the study over again, I would adopt a recurring interview approach, coupled with participant-observation of learning situations in classrooms and outside formal education and 'critical incident' analysis. In this way, other kinds of links between the situation of being an adult learner in a formal learning context, and the influence of prior lifelong learning influences, could be explored in even more depth. Such an approach would also enable me to understand more about the life-worlds of different kinds of learners in the same learning situation, and how different dimensions of social identity may interact with particular learning conditions to curtail or enhance a sense of learner identity and possibility.

In conclusion, this study has enabled me to learn a great deal about how the, "resonances between the personal and the professional are the source of both insight and error." As Mary Catherine Bateson suggests, I have tried to avoid

"mistakes and distortions not so much by trying to build a wall between the observer and the observed as by observing the observer - observing yourself - as well as bringing the personal issues into consciousness." (1984)

My own learning has been central throughout the study, and the writing of this thesis. My experience of this research, and the paradigm within which it has been undertaken, has convinced me that knowledge 'out there' can never be divorced from the knowledge and the distortions we have within ourselves. There are thus inevitably caveats and constraints upon any claims made that I cannot yet see. But I welcome the dialogue which is certain to ensure that critical self-reflection and the learning process continues.

4. The study in context: access issues in Britain six years on

This study was undertaken explicitly within a changing social and political context in which access concerns were becoming paramount, and the challenges that wider access would pose to traditional British higher education being acknowledged. Since that time, the situation has become more intense, with access now at the forefront of current debate. This debate has been further sharpened by the intervention of government. In 1988, Robert Jackson, Minister for Higher Education, pointed out that the extent to which women, black people and working class people were under-represented was, "not just uneconomic but unfair and unjust as well." (AUT/SCUE 1988) In 1989, Kenneth Baker announced the government's intention to increase participation from 13 to 30%. He spoke specifically about the need to target higher education at specific groups, arguing that, "There will be a much greater emphasis on a variety of approaches to better able meet the needs of different types of students." (DES, 1989) Demographic decline, economic growth, skills shortages and social change are cited as the reasons why access had to be given the utmost attention by higher education institutions, points argued also in the DES white paper, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* (1987) and by the Council for Industry and Higher Education (1988).

Attention is also being turned increasingly to the impact and process of the higher education on offer to more and different students. Institutions are being urged to consider what responsiveness and quality may mean in a more socially diverse higher education system

rather than an elite one. The following questions (see also Weil, forthcoming) are now frequently the subject of considerable speculation:

-What are students learning and why?

-In what kinds of learning processes are they engaging?

-What is the quality of their experience and what kinds of criteria (quantitative and qualitative) are being used to determine 'quality'?

-How effectively and efficiently are resources being deployed to develop the potential of new kinds of students?

-To what extent do flexibility, openness and choice obtain with regard to learning structures and opportunities?

-Is the education on offer experienced by different kinds of students as 'relevant, useful and enabling?' (Ball, 1988) and just what does this mean in practice?

-Are students being helped to 'learn how to learn' for a changing world in which social relations are more complex, professional authority and the effectiveness of traditional structures being challenged, and knowledge and information increase at a rapid pace? (Weil, 1989a)

Those who are concerned with higher education are trying to forge pathways through the tangled thicket of responses that such questions will raise, depending upon whose agenda is at issue: the funding councils, employers, professional bodies, validating authorities, heads of institutions or academic subject specialists. The search for synthesis out of possible antithesis is giving rise to rich debate about the kind of higher education system that might best accommodate the expectations of different kinds of stakeholders. (Weil, forthcoming)

This study, however, has been concerned with the perspectives of an increasingly influential group of stakeholders: the learners themselves, heretofore often invisible in such debates. Phrases like 'service delivery to clients' have appeared in the higher education vocabulary. Demographic decline and changes in government funding

policies have placed growing emphasis on the 'student as consumer', and many institutions are now openly competing for new students.

In this study, learners' reflections on issues such as quality and responsiveness derive from their experiences of having returned to formal learning contexts, and particularly academic learning programmes. Moreover, the voices in this study come from those adults who are often at issue in these debates but whose perspectives remain significantly under-represented in the literature, as identified in Chapter 1.

The majority who speak in this study have also demonstrated their 'ability to benefit' from higher education (the concern of the UGC and NAB reports to which I referred in Chapter 1), despite the personal struggles some have experienced. Perhaps most importantly in the context of widening access, most of this group spent their lives believing that such an opportunity would never be available for the 'likes of them'.

In the section which follows, I consider the implications of this study in the context of current concerns to widen access and enhance responsiveness of formal learning contexts. These concerns will become more urgent over the next decade as the British higher education system undergoes changes that have been unprecedented in its history. I have chosen to focus on the implications for higher education and on access routes into higher education particularly, since the majority of those in the study spoke from that situated perspective.

I consider these implications under three headings:

- Widening access and supporting transitions to higher education: more and the same or more and different?
- The experience of learning: enhancing responsiveness and quality for learners from socially diverse backgrounds

- Challenges to dominant conceptions of truth and knowledge

In so doing, I shall relate key issues arising from this study to relevant recent work.

5. Widening Access, and supporting the transition, to higher education: 'more and the same' or 'more and different?'

5.1. The challenge from those who do not identify with formal education

This study suggested how influences of learning at school, and across the spheres of home and school, for some gave rise to a sense of integration, as well as a clear sense of identity and possibility as a learner. For others, a very different scenario characterised their experiences of learning during the initial school years: a sense of disjunction prevailed. Some may have been fortunate enough to discover later outside formal education a meaning for learning that was personally self-validating, and helped to compensate for earlier damage. Others may not have been so lucky.

The latter group tended to be the adults who spoke about how they discovered only by chance that higher education courses were increasingly open to mature students without traditional qualifications. Their sense of learner identity in relation to formal education did not seem to have embraced any such option. This counter-tendency to access has been supported by recent research (Coats, 1988; Woodley et al, 1987) and lends support to the findings of the ACACE 1982 survey cited in Chapter 1.

Information that the option of higher education is available has been shown continually to be insufficient to ensure access would automatically result, (eg. Atkin and Hutchinson 1981). In this study, barriers such as confidence, guilt about doing something for oneself, concern about relationships continually emerge as obstacles for those,

particularly women: an outcome supported by a recent study by Martin (1988) and more generally by Griffin and Smithers (1984).

As in Martin's study, the personal encouragement of others was seen to be vital in helping these adults to take the first steps. A student may then have gravitated towards a particular programme because of a certain interest, geographical convenience, serendipity or because they heard that mature students were welcomed there. Their life circumstances may have made them more receptive to information about possible options, and those who had experienced 'discovery' may have developed sufficiently more self-esteem to allow the seed of the idea to take hold. The choice of programme tended to be predicated more upon, 'They accepted me' rather than upon a careful consideration of, "Is this the right course for me?" The latter question requires a certain level of self-esteem, and confidence in one's sense of possibility and identity in relation to formal education. It also depends upon having had a certain amount of experience of manoeuvring one's way about the system, and learning what kinds of questions to ask.

Finally, upon acceptance, many adults did not have a clear 'moving towards orientation', so characteristic of the professionals, and those whose sense of learner identity was associated tied up with formal education. It was only after their experience of returning, and coming through a programme, that many of the educationally disadvantaged adults realised the importance of choosing programmes not just on the basis of subject interests, but on the basis of other kinds of criteria of quality. Their 'moving towards' orientation seemed to emerge later.

5.2.A re-assessment of access strategies in light of these outcomes.

In current debates the following strategies are some of the ones most often cited in relation to widening access: assessment of prior experiential learning; modularisation, offering credit accumulation and transfer opportunities ; part-time study; distance/open learning

and finally, access courses (e.g. Slowey, 1988; Woodrow, 1988; NIACE, 1989; NAB, 1988). These strategies, with the exception of the latter, I would argue, pre-suppose that potential learners have a 'moving-towards orientation' to formal education, seek validation of their identity and learning by the formal education system, and are pre-disposed by their previous experiences of initial education to pursue developmental needs and goals in that kind of forum.

My involvement in this study leads me to suggest such strategies are likely to prove successful in widening access to more students, but I would question whether they will be successful in attracting more and different students. Consistently, studies of participation patterns in higher and continuing education show that those who re-enter formal education are those who already have considerable experience of education. Atkins and Hutchins (1981) refer to the 'Trenaman effect', after an adult educator who 20 years ago spoke about how, "like is attracted to like; those who have seek for more; the facilities which are offered are taken up in the main by only those who are well endowed." (p. 364)

A recent study on adults' participation patterns in the U.S., Canada and Europe indicates, "the typical adult [student] appears more likely to be there because of previous educational advantages rather than disadvantages. (CERI/OECD, 1987) Woodley et al (1987) indicates that women in Britain (not in the U.S. and other OECD countries) are under-represented on part -time award-bearing courses, and over-represented on non-award bearing courses. In addition, Woodley et al (1987) report that only about 8 percent of mature students in all forms of higher education in the U.K. are working class, with 70% representing the service class. The Open University, perceived by many as one of the main access routes in Britain, attracts 53% with qualifications above A-level, with only 6 percent entering with no formal qualifications whatsoever. (See also Woodley, 1988) These analyses would suggest that, as in this study, the professionals, those who learned at an early age to identify with formal education, and those who have moved in and out of structured learning

opportunities most of their lives, and those whose previous experiences have helped them to identify personal fulfillment and achievement with participation in higher education are the group who will benefit from widened access.

There may, however, be those in society who have no desire to have their experiential learning assessed and accredited in terms of existing knowledge and status quo assumptions. (see also Weil and McGill, 1989b) Part-time study and distance teaching may reduce opportunities to 'learn in relation' and to build confidence through affirmation by and dialogue with others. Credit accumulation and transfer schemes are predicated on the assumption that students have criteria and goals to inform their selection of courses, and the confidence to give personal meaning and coherence to diverse content-based modules.

It would seem that alternative kinds of outreach approaches are required if higher education institutions are to attract new kinds of students. For example, the valuable role that outreach workers, with whom mature students can identify, has been cited in a recent analysis of widening access to adult education by different ethnic groups. (FEU, 1989) It would seem that outreach strategies and workers need to take account of ways in which personal encouragement can be offered, and reflection on options can be facilitated, in ways that have personal meaning for those whom they seek to attract to formal education. In addition, in the context of this study, it was seen as vital that any educational guidance was offered in the context of involving, rather than distancing, relationships, and was experienced as relevant to those who have little or no predisposition to return to formal education. This point has also been made by UDACE:

"Educational guidance is (...)more than simply helping people to choose a package of learning from the shelf, it involves profound changes in the way people see themselves and can play an important part in the reshaping of the curriculum of our education and training agencies around the needs of learners." (UDACE, 1986)

5.3. Access courses: advantages and disadvantages.

Access courses would seem to address the concerns and issues raised by this study more explicitly, in that these are clearly not directed at those who are accustomed to moving, 'in and out' of education 'towards' a self-defined goal. Initiated in 1978 (DES, 1978; Millins, 1984) by the DES in 7 institutions, as an experiment, the numbers of access courses have steadily increased. There were fewer than 100 in 1983 but the national figure now approaches 500, based on current data analysis from the National Forum for Access Studies (FAST). These courses are targetted specifically at non-standard entrants:

"...[not] those non-standard entrants who can demonstrate their skills effectively and who are articulate and confident enough to find their way through the jungle of alternative entry procedures [but at] those with much lower expectations; those whose educational disadvantage may have been reinforced by social and economic hardship; those who could not write an essay which would demonstrate their readiness for a degree course; those whose interview techniques would be unlikely to earn them admission to any institution; those who would be described, by themselves as well as by others, as 'not university material'. This 'non-traditional' category of 'non-standard' entrants to higher education includes women, the unemployed or those on low incomes, and members of black and ethnic minority groups. " (Woodrow, 1988, p. 320)

Over the past 15 years, there have been a number of access courses and opportunities targetted particularly at women, in addition to the Hillcroft diploma (See Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Michaels, 1973). (Berryman (1987) argues, however, that the , "ideological pressure is now towards equal and undifferentiated educational opportunities for both women and men." (p. 26)) Nonetheless there are more courses targetted at specific Black and ethnic minority groups (such as for Bangladeshi students at City and East London College). Some are based on a reformist model; others on a radical model (Falken, 1988) Such courses would seem to be generally a positive force for change, particularly in light of recent research that upholds the effective performance of 'non-standard' entrants to higher education (Bourner et al, 1988). Woodrow's assessment of these

changes resonates strongly with issues raised by participants in this study:

"What has been achieved is that the centre of the debate has shifted from the quality of the Access student and the relevance of the Access Course curriculum to the quality of the higher education environment and the relevance of the curriculum. The change so far as has been in attitude rather than in practices. The view, for example, that 'universities are to develop subjects not people, persists, but despite the significance still attached to research ratings, no longer goes unchallenged. Access entrants still report that, 'in the regime of higher education, the structure, style and place of tuition militate against active and co-operative learning' but there is at last a recognition of the importance of the learning environment as a significant factor which can influence student success, and of the contribution that non-traditional students can make to, the reviewing, updating and responsiveness of the curriculum.' The traditional interpretation of academic quality, as the acquisition of a received body of knowledge within firm discipline boundaries, is no longer the only interpretation." (Woodrow, 1988, p. 333)

In this, Woodrow sounds a hopeful note. There are several warning gongs, however, that I believe must also be sounded, based on my engagements in this study.

The first is that the responsibility for the validation of access courses is now being placed with universities and polytechnics, who will then franchise adult and further education colleges to design and deliver programmes. (CVCP/CNAA, 1989). It remains to be seen whether the traditional strength of access courses - the development of people, rather than merely the dissemination of knowledge - will be diminished by the traditional downward trend of academic drift (Burgess, 1981), or by specific demands for greater academic content coverage on the part of validating institutions. Ironically, those with the poorest record with regard to widening access to new kinds of students will now have the most power.

Secondly, this study suggests that access courses provide an important means of offering learning experiences to adults that are more likely to be characterised by integration, possibly discovery, and the development of a new sense of learner identity and

possibility. They offer 'non-traditional students' the opportunity to learn with others, with whom they can identify - something of vital importance to adults who experienced disjunction in their academic learning programmes. Simultaneously, they can help to value positively adults learning experiences outside higher education. But they can also heighten the very culture shock such courses set out to diminish.

The contrast between an access learning environment and a traditional academic one can be immense, as indicated by the follow up of Hillcroft students in this study. Although their prior experience seemed to provide, to some extent, a kind of special reserve upon which they could draw, nonetheless, the decision to persist in the new environment could be fraught with struggle and indecision. As Pantziarka, a former access course student himself, argues:

"It could be said that the trauma, and that is precisely what it is, of moving onto the receiving higher education course, is something which an Access scheme should seek to minimise, but is this realistic? The relationships and ways of working established during the Access programme do not translate into the regime of higher education where the structure, style and place of tuition militates against active and cooperative learning. (Pantziarka, 1987, p. 104)

It would seem that those involved in access courses need to help students to anticipate and prepare for the culture shock they are likely to encounter. Accounts from those who have made that transition may be helpful in such work. Similarly, the establishment of self-managed support groups (a point made by Connie in Cycle 8) amongst classmates may help to provide opportunities for reflection on experiences of the subsequent learning context. For example, follow up interviews in this study helped adults to untangle a sense of who they were as a learner in one kind of situation, and what was happening in the new context. Moreover, those who kept in contact with classmates from Hillcroft found that they played a vital support role, in helping them to manage disjunction.

Thirdly, access courses are founded on a principle of collaboration between the access course provider and the receiving higher education

institution. (Woodrow, 1988). This principle of collaboration, however, needs to operate both ways. Accountability and planning on the part of the receiving institution, for the explicit strategies they will offer to ease the transition of students from access courses, would seem essential. I shall develop this point further below.

In conclusion, I support Parry's view (1986) that there is a paradox at the heart of access provision. The purpose of an access course is to prepare non-traditional entry students to cope with higher education. But are they only being prepared to cope with a system, "not designed to meet their needs?" (1986, p. 49) The rapid growth of access courses could mean that higher education institutions can continue to avoid their own responsibilities to ensure that all courses provide a positive 'access experience' for all kinds of students. This kind of aim is essential, if the issue of disjunction for students moving from access courses onto higher education is to be addressed. As Scott (1986) argues, the presence of non-traditional students in higher education will mean,

"that the operation, the character, even the purposes of the system will have to change. Put in the simplest terms the higher education system of the future which caters, many hope, for much broader sections of the community will be - must be - very different from the higher education system of the past which only catered for a comparatively restricted group both academically and socially." (Scott, 1986, p. 54)

Failure to change is likely to reinforce the dominant pattern of access serving the needs of largely educationally advantaged, rather than disadvantaged groups. I shall now go on to consider the kinds of changes, in the character, operation and purposes of higher education that seem essential if the system is to be experienced as responsive and enabling, and as a provider of opportunities for discovery, rather than an experience characterised by disjunction.

6. Access to a responsive and enabling higher education experience

6.1. Transitions that promote integration rather than disjunction

In the United States, where a mass higher education system operates, and where wider access for women, minority groups, and low-income people has been at issue in recent years, there are trends that seem most pertinent in the current British context and the outcomes of this study. There, the three threats of , "a diminishing student pool, attrition rates, and students' analyses of the benefit of their educations" (Noel, 1985) have shifted attention from the individual student, to the responsibilities of institutions, and the overall quality of the relationship as it is experienced by different kinds of learners. (Astin, 1985, 1987, 1988) These trends have recently been the subject of much debate at conferences where access is a concern:

Marchese, Vice-President of the American Association for Higher Education in 1985 captures the nature of the shift in emphasis from the student, to the responsibilities of institutions to address the overall character of the student experience:

"In the sixties, we began with an academic literature on issues of student persistence and attainment. During the seventies, the vocabulary shifted from 'persistence' to 'retention', that is, to the needs of the institution; the focus moved to techniques and program adaptations believed to retain students. Now we are in a new place, in which the focus is less on techniques and brushing up services than it is on the overall character of the experience offered to students." (in Noel et al, 1985)

Attention to continuing processes of, "critical self-examination that focuses on the institution's contribution to the students' intellectual and personal development" (Astin, 1980 in Noel, 1985).

Studies of American attrition rates show that the first year experience is critical. Those faculty advisors and staff, who are most capable of stimulating the personal involvement of students are shown to be needed^d in frontline contact positions. In other words, the

quality and rate of staff-student interaction at the point of the student's transition to the institution has been shown to be of critical importance in retaining traditionally under-represented students, and in assuring them that they will benefit from the experience. (Noel et al, 1985).

In addition, in the United States there is a growth in emphasis on 'orientation programmes' where students are encouraged to reflect on their learning styles, and their prior learning experiences, as well as on their assumptions about education generally and higher education in particular. Such reflections can also serve as the basis for the accreditation of experiential learning, outside formal education, (Steltenpohl and Shipton, 1986; Redwine, 1989). These programmes provide an opportunity comparable to those offered by the Hillcroft 'Valuing your experience', Returning to Learning programmes (e.g. Michaels, 1973) and Bridging courses (Hutchinson, 1978). More recent developments encourage accreditation of prior learning as part of the orientation process. (Evans, 1984, 1988)

Specially targetted provision that promotes this kind of active reflection, while lending explicit support to students whose prior experiences of learning have been less than satisfactory, has been shown to be attractive to adults who might not otherwise have considered 'returning to learning'. For example, several studies acknowledge the critical role courses targetted at working class women have played in increasing the likelihood of their return to higher education (Woodley et al, 1987; Hutchinson, 1986). The experiences of women at Hillcroft, as recounted in this study, further underlines the potential value of such provision. Accounts of transitions in this study, about first encounters with higher education, as well as what it was like to learn in one kind of learning context where a sense of integration is experienced, as opposed to another characterised by disjunction, also lends credibility to the view that the 'first year' and the 'front line' are critical.

6.2 The experience of learning in higher education: questions of quality

Quality concerns in this study continually underlined the importance of personal involvement and active support, especially for students whose prior experiences of learning had undermined their confidence, and their sense of identity and possibility as a learner. These concerns were associated with participants' willingness and capacity to learn to full potential in a particular learning situation. This was particularly true for women who had a low sense of self-worth and for whom affirmation came through dialogue with and support from others.

The kinds of interactions that afforded opportunity for reflection, challenge and support, were associated with a sense of enhanced integration and discovery (or continued discovery). For those whose experience of higher education was characterised by disjunction, it was the opportunity to experience a sense of personal involvement with some staff, with other students and with at least some aspects of a programme, that helped them to manage the experience.

These themes resonate with those suggested by research into attrition referred to above (Levitz, 1985; Peterson, 1989) and throw into question the kinds of decisions about arrangements for teaching and learning that institutions are now considering with a view to widening access at a time of severe resource constraints. The question that it would seem needs to be grappled with, in relation to widening access, is, what kind of relationships and opportunities for dialogue, involvement and the development of personal understanding will be made available to new kinds of learners? Will they experience higher education as a learning opportunity that builds and repairs their confidence, actively values their knowledge borne out of a different experience, and enhances personal and intellectual development? Or will their experience require them to concentrate their energies on some kind of preservation of the 'self' and survival

in an alienating environment. For under the latter conditions, development of any kind is surely put at risk.

Some of the research reviewed in Chapter 1, and subsequent studies, suggest that traditional teaching, learning and assessment arrangements and institutional priorities (e.g. promotion is still based on research, not teaching, in the majority of institutions) (Trow, 1988) may not only be counter to widening access and providing a positive learning experience for new students; they may also be undermining the potential of existing traditional age students and putting to the test many claims of higher education to promote changes in understanding. (Ramsden, 1988)

I can now see the extent to which the Swedish and Lancaster research reviewed in Chapter 1 fails to acknowledge themes of identity and struggle. These studies, I believe, implicitly assume that students experience an inherent sense of integration, not disjunction, in formal learning environments. The studies do not address the ways in which academic material may itself prove problematic for students. Nonetheless, this research lends considerable weight to the frustrations described by some students in this study, on traditional courses, who experienced a lack of emphasis on critical thinking and an over-emphasis on exam passing.

Ramsden and others in recent reviews of this vein of research (Ramsden et al, 1988; Ramsden, 1983; Ramsden, 1986) argue that current practices and arrangements in higher education still tend to emphasise pleasing teachers and largely isolated study of academic material focused on satisfying assessment procedures. The body of work, upon which he draws, continues to affirm that these emphases may be at variance with the development of a deep understanding of academic material, and intellectual development generally. In his more recent work, he argues for more small group learning, in which students can work closely with other students and teachers to construct meaning out of academic material. (Ramsden, 1988) An approach to learning, Ramsden argues, concerns "a relation between a

learner and a learning task" -a term that essentially describes a dynamic, and has meaning only "with reference to a situation and to certain types of content." He stresses the importance of thinking about teaching and learning in a holistic way:

"If we focus separately on students' experiences, learning skills, students' characteristics, what teachers do, and what subject content consists of, we fail to understand some of the important things that happen when people learn in educational settings." (1987, p. 276)

It is for this reason that the body of research from which Ramsden's work derives lays emphasis on student perceptions and meanings in particular kinds of learning situations.

Similarly, Perry's work also lays stress on the importance of relationships, in his consideration of critical transition points in a students' development of understanding:

"It is now clear that a teacher's confirmatory offering of community is necessary even in the highest reaches of development. Here, where both formal logic and even 'reflective probabilistic judgement' fail to support the tensions of life's paradoxes, the student's development is at risk. Even if students do achieve a sense of irony, it may drift into bitter alienation." (1981)

Perry supports Ramsden's view that teachers need to acknowledge that students in the same classroom may be making very different meanings of their educational experiences. To fail to address these differences can undermine the achievement of academic goals (Perry, 1988). As discussed in Chapter 1, Perry is speaking with reference to his 'scale of positions', as derived from his study of Harvard undergraduates. The research of Ramsden, Marton, Richardson, Entwistle and others has been concerned with the academic understanding of traditional age students, (Ramsden, 1988, 1987; Marton et al, 1984; Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Richardson et al, 1987). Their assertions have even more poignancy for me when considered from the perspective of the full range of accounts in this study. The analysis presented in this thesis, when considered with reference to these other studies, suggests even further complexities which we need

to consider in their entirety when addressing wider issues of responsiveness and quality to more and different students in higher education.

In some institutions, it is likely that the staff-student ratio is going to be increased, and during the early years of programmes, mass lectures will predominate. In others, attention is being paid to the critical importance of seminars and small group experiences, and support for more learner-centred and learner-managed learning, in the same context of severe resource constraints. In some institutions, the quality of the learning experience is at issue and there is considerable investment of time and energy in staff development and overall policies to support innovation and development of new teaching and learning strategies; in others, research concerns still predominate and there is little discussion about teaching and learning, except in terms of subject coverage. (Stephenson and Weil, forthcoming)

It would thus seem important to consider the consequences of teaching and learning arrangements and resource decisions in the context of how best to enable more and different students to not merely survive, but also to thrive: intellectually and emotionally. Such outcomes have been shown by numerous studies over the past decade to be dependent not upon simplistic variables such as student motivation, A levels, or lecturers' subject expertise. Instead, the quality of a student's experience of learning in higher education is linked directly to the opportunities he or she has to feel involved, make personal sense of academic material, and be given many opportunities to develop personal understanding of material, through particular kinds of relationships with teachers and other students. The experience of higher education, I argue, should enhance a sense of learner possibility and identity, not diminish it. Whereas prior to this study I assumed such outcomes to be, on the whole, 'taken for granted' with reference to higher education, my involvement in this study, and my re-evaluation of the literature cited above in light of its outcomes, has led me to question this assumption.

6.3. Learning-in- relation: a quality concern for women

Descriptions from female study participants of learning situations which afforded possibilities for personal involvement and understanding, and advice to teachers from Hillcroft students, often conveyed the importance of 'learning in relation'. This was an additional critical factor that did not seem to be at issue in the same way for the smaller number of men whom I interviewed. I believe that this study provides a great deal of guidance on ways in which a sense of 'learning in relation' for women can be fostered. Women's reflections were consistently focused, implicitly and explicitly, on what groups and particular kinds of learning situations 'felt like' and what 'talk felt like' therein.

This study emphasises the importance of the role of the teacher as someone who is open and responsive to different kinds of knowledge and to different ways of making sense of knowledge. Female learners wanted teachers to support their making of connections, since these contributed to the development of their thinking and personal understanding. They wanted teachers to work actively alongside them in making sense of academic material in the context of their assumptive frameworks about themselves-in-relation to the world. They required learning experiences that first affirmed, but could also challenge their sense of learner identity in ways that were enabling, not disabling. Such experiences continually kept alive their sense of possibility as learners, and therefore, their willingness to take greater and greater risks, pushing the very boundaries of their experience.

Moreover, the quality of the dialogue has been shown in this study to be of vital importance if those who have been traditionally under-represented in higher education are to feel able to express themselves - their own identity, in their own voice. Women conveyed to me the wish for uncertainty to be valued explicitly and actively over clear positioning and the taking of premature stances that are then liable to be attacked through 'logical argument.' Under conditions

that allowed them to explore, rather than defend and argue, they felt better able to risk challenges to their assumptions, and tests of their understanding.

Climate setting, conducive to enhancing opportunities for these ways of learning, and for integration, has long been a concern in the humanistic psychology literature (Rogers, 1969, 1983) and has been further stressed by Knowles (1978) in his assertions about how adults best learn, as described in Chapter 1. But further complexities, noticeably absent in such literature, have been suggested by this study. For example, it would seem that concerns with climate setting cannot be divorced from considerations of power relations, competing views of knowledge, and the different 'life worlds' (Wildemeersch, 1989) of learners which have influenced what it may mean to learn with others. Moreover, some accounts suggest that learners benefit from having tutors with whom they can identify, personally and socially, thus enhancing the possibilities for learning-in-relation.

It was not until much later in the study that I began to recognise that these concerns particularly - not exclusively - preoccupied women. There seemed to be nuances of difference, in their emphases and their preoccupations. I was helped to make sense of these issues as 'gender-related' by the work of Belenky et al (1986), which I encountered late in this study. These four developmental and feminist researchers set out to explore the experiences and problems 135 women encountered, "as learners and knowers [and] review their past histories for changing concepts of the self and relationships with others." (p.11) This is one of the few studies to have adopted this focus and to approach it through depth interviews, although a schedule building explicitly on the work of Gilligan (1977) and Perry (1970,1981) underpinned their explorations. They spoke with women, age eighteen and upwards, in academic institutions and in what they call, 'invisible colleges', such as those attached to human service agency programmes.

The outcomes of this study suggest that teachers need to be maternal in their thinking and mid-wives in their approach. They speak about 'connected teaching':

"In a connected class no one apologizes for uncertainty. It is assumed that evolving thought will be tentative. " (p. 221)

This research team describes five different ways of knowing derived from their analysis of the accounts of women in their study: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. They assert that a "quest for self and voice plays a central role in transforming women's way of knowing." (p. 133) The latter position they refer to as "integrating the voices", thus echoing another theme in this study.

I did not bring a feminist perspective to this research, as discussed previously. This book, however, enhanced my capacity to recognise differences, and to make sense of themes that were so persistent in women's stories. The work of these researchers helped me to recognise how Hillcroft provided many 'midwife' teachers, the majority of whom were women, who nurtured a climate for learning that promoted the making of connections, as described in Part II. When Sally moved from Hillcroft to a science based course, in a very traditional department within a university, she herself suggested that there were 'male ways' and 'female ways' of learning, as discussed in Chapter 7. When I later encountered Women's ways of knowing, I made much clearer sense of what she was describing. For example, they suggest that women's difficulties with science are attributed to a lack of emphasis on 'science in relation' to people: a point that Sally made so clearly. Equally, they helped me towards another way of thinking about themes in Karen's account of her writing block, discussed in Chapter 7 and 8. She continually referred to her 'absolutely brilliant' tutor, who made her feel as if she had nothing whatsoever to say. The following seemed to capture vividly the essence of what I now believe Karen was describing:

"Women have been taught by generations of men that males have greater powers of rationality than females have. When a male professor presents only the impeccable products of his thinking, it is especially difficult for a women student to believe that she can produce such a thought." (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 216-7)

When I examined the theme of learning-in-relation in connection with the few men's accounts, I was struck by the nuances of difference, and the complexities that before I would have easily subsumed into some 'Knowlesian category', as discussed in Chapter 1. I recognised how especially for Kolb (1975, 1984) but also still for Knowles (1978, 1984b) the theme of relationships figures little. I began to re-question the tendency of learning theories to emphasise sameness rather than difference.

Coats (1988), in her recent study of women returners, suggests that women experience a socialisation pattern which differentiates them as girls, and produces distinctive patterns of behaviour; and an educational system which differentiates both experiences and expectations on grounds of gender and social class. Moreover, she argues that women still are the ones who must wrestle with parenting as a dominant commitment for a number of years. (p. 373)

Bernard (1973, p. 782 in Calloway, 1981) suggests, "Not only do men and women view a common world from different perspectives; they view different worlds as well."

Marshall (1984) identifies, "independence, focus, clarity, discrimination, activity, control of the environment and attention to parts" as characteristic of the 'male principle' as it is constructed in this society, and "interdependence, patterns, being, acceptance, receptivity and perception of wholes" as characteristic of the female principle. (p. 173)

Miller argues (1986) that women are especially skilled in "embracing the well-being and experience of others" but that this remains devalued in our society.

Writers such as these affirm the creative positives that women bring to a learning situation: sadly, all too often seen as deficits. Moreover, when I consider particular outcomes of this study against this writing, it seems that an approach to learning which de-values interaction, and fails to take account of these "rival views of the world and the validity and status of such rival views" ^(Hope and Kean, 1981) may generate, with the best intentions in the world, a sense of disjunction for women learners. In turn, their sense of learner identity and possibility may be needlessly undermined. Consequences may include loss of confidence and the inability or unwillingness to enter into and give voice to what is being experienced and felt.

It would seem that a great deal more attention needs to be paid to women's experiences as learners in higher education, both through research and the teaching-learning process itself and this in particular I wish to follow up through future studies.

But at the same time, I would not wish to diminish the impact that the outcomes of this study has had on particularly working class men, as identified in Cycle 8. Therefore, I am equally committed to following up the themes of disjunction and integration, and learner identity, in comparative studies. These conceptual formulations seem useful if they are posed as questions/ marks against which many different adults can consider their own experience.

Through such studies, I believe we can further deepen our understanding of not just the complexities entailed when adults learn in higher education, but also we can become more aware of possibilities for enhancing integration and development.

7.Challenges to dominant conceptions of truth and knowledge

7.1 Making the implicit explicit.

As discussed previously, Jarvis (1987) has recently begun to address theoretically and empirically some of the issues that have been

surfaced in this study (1987). Although he begins with the premise that disjunction is the starting point for learning, he nonetheless acknowledges the impact of learners' social pasts on their 'reading' of learning situations:

"Learners cannot just throw off their social past when they enter a formal learning situation, because there is a sense in which they are, in part, that past. Their minds, their thought processes, their language, etc. all reflect that past, so that their definition of the teaching and learning situation, and their understanding of the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be learned are affected by that past. " (Jarvis, 1987, p. 193)

I now accept that, "conceptions of knowledge and truth (...) as accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by a privileged and "male-dominated majority culture" and "men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history, and set values that have become the building principles for men and women alike". (Belenky, et al, 1986). The men who have largely determined the agenda of formal learning contexts have also been white and able-bodied. Their own perspectives have evolved out of the bedrock of their own identity and experience. Dominant thought processes and language, assumptions and structures, the definition of the teaching and learning situation, the understandings of what is to be learned: these are all affected by that social past.

Such perspectives, for many years, have remained implicit and unquestioned. They have *not* been placed at issue because the experiences of other social groups, shaped by the bedrock of their different identities, have remained excluded from the academic except on specific terms.

So, for example, since Plato, the highest form of knowledge is abstract and philosophical; knowledge which flows from experience, emotion, intuition or passions has been seen as suspect, dangerous. (e.g. Griffin, 1982; 1978; Elshtain, 1981) Research has traditionally been defined as objective observation, in search of truth, with prediction and control as its aims. Fragmentation of the complex

wholes into manageable variables and parts have been associated with the desirable aspects of traditional scientific method. In the social sciences, subjects' thoughts or feelings have traditionally been viewed as irrelevant, and equally, the investigator has been seen to be able to rise above his or her personal concerns in the conception, design, conduct, analysis and conclusions of research. Argyris (1980) suggests that this kind of self-deception, the contradiction between espoused values and what occurs in actual practice, has led to the development of knowledge that consistently reinforces the status quo.

A sense of disjunction seems inevitable for certain learners whose social past and social and personal meanings remain invisible; for those who have not been socialised into taking dominant meanings for granted, managing self-deceptions and contradictions between espoused values and practices, and keeping knowledge at a distance from a messy unequal and all too real world. Williams captures the dilemma that more learners than we may realise may be having to manage in higher education, some with less pain and struggle than others:

"We see and learn from the ways our families live and get their living: a world of work and of place, and of beliefs so deeply dissolved into everyday actions that we don't at first even know they are beliefs, subject to change and challenge. Our education, quite often, gives us a way of looking at that life which can see other values beyond it: as Jude saw them when he looked across the land to Christminster...the values, the educated methods are of course made available to us if we get to a place like Christminster: if we are let in as Jude was not. But with the offer, again and again, comes another idea: that the world of everyday work and of ordinary families is inferior, distant: that now we know this world of mind we can have no respect - and of course, no affection - for that other and still familiar world. "(Williams, 1973. p. 198)

Luttrell, (1989) in her recent study, has also tapped into these dilemmas, through her study of women participating in adult education provision. Streetwise knowledge, and the kind of learning required to survive in an imperfect world in which these women were marginalised, were highly valued. Her analysis suggests that these women saw school as a threat to 'commonsense' knowledge, in that you might 'lose it'. This was seen to be not without personal risk and

social cost. The accounts reported in her recent publication indicate the extent to which adults in this study - urban and rural poor in adult literacy classes - associated the likelihood of disjunction (she, like Jarvis, refers to disjuncture) , with a return to education.

There were those in this study who felt able to make connections freely, between their personal concerns and questions and those of others who differed from them; across the boundaries of academic disciplines; between the theoretical and the practical; the analytical and the intuitive; the knowledge that they had gained through living and the knowledge they encountered in books and lectures. There were others who felt hemmed into a particular way of knowing and learning that fragmented these possible connections. Learning reflected a one dimensional world, rather than the multi-dimensional variety of their lives. One kind of curriculum may have affirmed that fact, for example, "Women's lifelines tend to be criss-crossed, blurred, seemingly confused (...)" whereas, another mirrors the pattern of men's life patterns, which, "tend to run in parallel, and rarely come together: work is separate from home and home from leisure." (Hughes and Kennedy, 1985)

Thus, for some, learning was meaningful, involving enhancement and challenge. For others, learning was meaningless. For the latter group, certain kinds of structures, historical traditions, invisible values and rules, staff attitudes and behaviour, group processes and climates, and the tyranny of the syllabus could militate against the development of personal understanding and involvement. When their situation remained unheard or unrecognised, there were many learners who felt a sense of fragmentation, of disjunction, in themselves as learners and in their interactions with that learning environment.

As Johnson (1988) argues, such dilemmas have been produced again and again throughout history for groups who have been denied and then granted access to education:

"Most of the dilemmas have been hidden or unspoken. They have acquired a public voice when a particular group, faced with educational exclusion, has demanded access and then, ^{soon} or later, also faced the problem of 'content'. The dual dilemma has arisen for women who have had a long battle to fight since the mid-nineteenth century against exclusion, limited subject choices and informal subordination in the classroom. It has arisen for those excluded on racial or ethnic grounds who are then faced with the ethnocentrism or outright racism of existing curricula. The dilemma has been a continuous aspect of working-class educational experiences, particularly powerfully posed by adult or 'mature' students. First there is the struggle to 'get in'; and then all those struggles with teachers or tutors about what we want to know and they are prepared to teach." (Johnson, 1988, p. 15)

In this study, for some more than others, these things were at issue, because they felt (or sometimes explicitly understood) that something essential about who they were as learners, as people, was being placed under threat, in ways that de-valued rather than valued. Such disquiets may simply be felt as a kind of nagging inside. They may feel incoherent, and 'illogical'. How does one give expression to the feeling and account for its 'cause' to others who view education as a dissemination process rather than a developmental experience (Hodgson et al, 1987); to those who disregard social equity as a consideration in 'truth' or the search for knowledge; and to those whose social positioning affirms their role as 'the authority.' For some, having to manage a sense of disjunction, at the expense of other kinds of development, and possibly silence and withdrawal (or 'attrition') are just some of the consequences that can arise. For others, a distorted view of the world is maintained, and reproduced by those who have been educated and move into positions of power.

'Problems' of adjustment, a means by which a concern with disjunction might be dismissed, have traditionally been seen to be the concern of the student, and the pastoral care system or counselling service. This study however suggests that such issues are central to issues of equity and excellence (Astin, 1985) in the context of a changing system of higher education. Grappling with them requires grappling with the idea of higher education itself.

7.2. 'Legitimation crisis' in higher education

Overall, this study, I believe, puts into clearer relief Walkerdine's (1985) question:

"...how do we know, what do we see, and upon what basis is this knowledge, this truth constituted? (p. 50, original emphasis)

The consideration of these questions can be seen in the context of this study to have direct implications for widening access. Taken to their full conclusion, the experiences recounted in this study cannot help but raise serious questions about our academic establishments.

In recent years, the contradictions between the 'idea of higher education' and the strength of alternative perspectives have persistently been challenged. As Barnett argues, these challenges have rocked the foundations. Consequently, there is now, in higher education, according to Barnett, a 'legitimation crisis':

"The two pillars or axioms on which the idea of higher education has rested - those of objective knowledge and social independence - are both then under attack. The 'ivory tower' that they have seemed historically to support appears far from safe. But in fact the position, on further analysis, turns out to be far worse. To continue the metaphor for a moment, talk of cracking implies the possibility of patching up the defect, but what we have here is an undermining of the foundations." (Barnett, 1985, p. 249)

In the traditional psychological literature on self and identity, 'disjunction' is sometimes used to refer to a deficit, an abnormality in an individual. (e.g. Yardley and Honess, 1987) In our educational system, individuals who have failed to achieve, conform or persist have also traditionally been seen as deviants, with individual problems, in need of 'special education', counselling and therapy.

In this study, however, the notion of learning identity, as something which is *jointly* constituted, is given additional substance and meaning. Moreover, learning is seen to be less about something that *happens* to someone in certain situations, and more about, as Kelly

says, " what makes him or her a person in the first place. "
(Kelly, 1963, p. 75)

This study draws attention to deficits and abnormalities in the assumptions and practices of our educational institutions and in the kinds of interactions that take place therein. Disjunction itself is a function of interaction in the wider social context. Deficits and abnormalities, and potential strengths, are thrown into sharper relief by virtue of the fact that in certain learning situations in higher education, in the same wider social context, disjunction was not the characteristic feature of the interaction.

This study led me to some exciting oases for learning and development in a wider arena where an enormous waste of potential and opportunity may be ~~be~~ occurring. It also gave rise to a sense of sadness and loss. The pain and struggle communicated by certain learners in this study is so very much in contradiction with espoused academic ideals about critical reflection, a community of scholars, and the search for 'truth' and knowledge as a critically independent and neutral activity.

As Virginia Woolf despaired, if you cannot find truth in the Reading Room of the British Museum, where can you find it? (1929)

Dominant themes and patterns in this study led me to recognise, reckon with and try to understand wider epistemological and social challenges to dominant ideologies, being posed by for example, post-positivism or feminism. For example, the feminist paradigm is, "not discipline based" cutting across traditional academic boundaries, "within the framework of the personal experience of the female... Feminism involves a new way of classifying the world." (Spender, 1978 in Calloway, 1978). Stanley and Wise (1983) assert that feminist consciousness involves more than a re-evaluation of the personal, but also the refusal to see it as inferior to, or even very different from 'science'. (1983, p. 6)

Equally, there is a rapidly growing literature in every discipline, written by men and by women who are trying to address the implications of new conceptions of the world emerging from physics, or the challenges of post-positivism, or the consequences of the traditional scientific method when viewed from the perspective of human understanding and human suffering. More recently, McCann (1988) wrote in very moving terms that academics need to make more links between, "the compassion that moves us and the knowledge that makes and masks us."

As Barnett (1985) argues, the impact of such fundamental social and epistemological challenges is giving rise to a kind of relentless revolution, perhaps less within formal learning contexts than outside it. In alternative contexts for learning, and in communities, outside formal education, many women, Black people and working class people are learning that 'it need not be like this'. From their own experience, it may seem that they can come to know (sometimes intuitively, sometimes conceptually) that many common sense assumptions perpetuated by academic authorities ignore, "all that gives life its vitality and its poignancy" and "the frustration, humiliation, misunderstanding and discrimination experienced by many (...) people in our society." (Salmon, 1983)

These are the same groups who are now being actively sought by higher education as new students. This study has suggested that such potential students may have greater opportunity to experience learning situations that reflect different epistemological and ideological assumptions, than those that dominate in traditional higher education, that repair and compensate, create a special reserve, generate discovery, and enhance their sense of possibility and learner identity. In alternative learning contexts, at the margins of and outside higher education, people seem to be increasingly exploring how people might best learn together, in ways that value their differences and thus free them to celebrate their commonalities; they are challenging dominant conceptions of truth and knowledge; professional authority is being questioned; and meanings of

'relativism and contextualism' in knowledge are being explored in ways that do not perpetuate a disjunction between theory and practice.

Traditional scientists, academics and others whose position and authority has gone unquestioned for years are much in the position of the fish,

"which finds it difficult to understand water because it has spent all of its life in it. So it is difficult for [them] to understand what impact their basic axioms or assumptions have upon everyday thinking and lifestyle. " (Lather, 1986)

The disjunction between the 'idea of higher education' and its reality, as experienced by different and new kinds of learners, may continue to be put fundamentally at issue as we widen access to more and different kinds of students. Their prior experiences of lifelong learning may have differentially influenced how they anticipate and experience aspects of higher education that may currently be taken for granted. Will their presence and questions provoke a resolution of the 'legitimation crisis'? Need this be at the expense of a sense of learners' identity and possibility? These are the questions which I am keen to pursue through further systematic inquiry in future. But now it seems time to come to rest.

8. Coming to rest

8.1. Introduction

I began this study in search of a methodology that would suit the purposes of my study. I now realise that I was searching for more than this: an epistemology and a way of being as a researcher that enhanced rather than undermined my own sense of identity, and my tacit understanding of the complexities of my lived experience. For reality to be understood as anything but multiple or socially constructed jarred with a fundamental sense of who I was and how I related to the world. But even after I began the study, I had neither the personal nor the academic language with which to articulate the disjunctions

that had been at the root of my disquiets about the traditional scientific model of research. My reading about qualitative research and grounded theory, coupled with the influences of Kelly and my supervisor had been sufficient to launch me into the study with confidence. But a deeper and more integrated understanding eluded me.

The language of post-positivism, discovered at the Bath University conferences and in the writing of Lincoln and Guba (1985) two years after the fieldwork began, triggered a major conceptual breakthrough. I began to find a way of making sense of my earlier disquiets. I was given a language which validated not just what I was doing and how but also something about me. Jigsaw bits from different realms of experience fell into place. In turn, the full implications of, and the rigours entailed in, working within this new paradigm - some of which I had identified at the beginning as expressed in Chapter 2 - hit full force. I was urged relentlessly along unimagined journeys entailing struggle and discovery, disjunction and integration.

Throughout, using the second voice, I have documented some key aspects of my struggles to bring into consciousness the personal issues triggered by my involvement in this particular study, as well as this kind of research. I have come to know deep in my bones that, as Salmon (1980) says, "knowledge is never independent of personal meanings, and values, of relationships and of social structures and groupings." Thus, as researchers we cannot 'act as if' knowledge is 'out there' and not also 'in here', in ourselves. (Reason and Marshall, 1984.)

Looking back now, I have a much deeper personal understanding of a statement by Salmon that I found early on in my reading:

"Questions...that are worth asking [in research] must somehow link into the network of assumptions about oneself and others that actually operate in the way we go about our lives. If they fail to do this, then they are bound to remain irrelevant. But actually to get at this assumptive network means achieving some grasp of what, though crucial, is

typically non-explicit and intuitive - what Polanyi calls tacit knowledge. And of course, though some of our most basic assumptions are shared by others, there is no identity across individuals in the private assumptive framework within which they live. " (1978, p. 36-7)

In this thesis I have set out to document the journey of the research, and the journey of myself. I have tried to convey the paradoxes yet also the integrity of purpose and process I have strived for in my undertaking of this study. In this final section, I shall first look back, knowing now that it is also time to move forward. I shall reflect on the preoccupations and assumptions with which I began the study, some of which were tacit, some of which were explicit. As documented in Chapter 1, a number of these were grounded in critical reflections on my own life and work experience. Some came into sharper focus as a result of my early reading. Others were rooted in taken-for-granted assumptions I held about the world, as shaped by the intertwinings of my own individual past with particular historical and social realities. Others I know now to have been entirely intuitive and lodged in the bedrock of my personal identity and my identity as a woman. I hope that this review will throw into clearer relief how these have been challenged, changed, elaborated or undermined - a central validity concern in qualitative and post-positivist, and as I now understand it, feminist research. I shall then draw this particular journey to a close.

8.3. From then till now: a process of learning and re-structuring

When I began this study, I was confident that the key to working with adults learning lay in progressive teaching and learning methodologies. I had made sense of my own experiences as an adult educator, and later as a mature student in Britain, within the framework of ideas developed by writers such as Knowles and Kolb. Their ideas further reinforced previous assumptions and influences which had shaped my own involvement in educational innovation in the States. I believed that progressive teaching and learning approaches were essentially neutral, and that the undifferentiated 'all' of adult learners would benefit equally from them, regardless of the

contexts and relationships within which they were experienced. I believed that the skills required by teachers to work with adults as learners could be listed.

At the beginning of the study , I had begun to question the limitations of psychology for addressing the questions which had emerged from my experience, both methodologically and in terms of how the academic discipline is constituted. However, I saw these limitations in quite simplistic terms. I wanted the freedom to move freely across the literature, from sociology, to education, to psychology. As I said in Chapter I, I wanted to function as a problem-centred learner, not a subject-based learner, in Knowles' terms (1978).

From the outset, I was interested in experiences of learning that involved issues of gender, age, class and race, as identified in my letters of introduction offered previously as appendices in Chapter 3. The framework for my thinking about these issues, however, was in terms of equal opportunities. I was preoccupied with power and barriers 'out there'. I had not considered these dimensions in relation to personal and social identity - much less my own.

I undertook this research with a strongly held belief in higher education as a largely benign and unconditional good, and with a commitment to its potential as a democratising force in society. Access to knowledge gave people power, choice and opportunity. Only positive things resulted. This study exposed me to the simplicity of this world-view and the real challenges entailed in making this a reality.

I would have described my approach as an adult educator as eclectic, but somewhere between humanism and radical humanism, although I drew on certain ideas from behaviourism, and cognitive psychology. I could not envisage the extent to which, by focusing entirely on learners' perspectives, I would come to understand how these theoretical frameworks say so little about the lived experience and

interpretative frameworks of different kinds of learners, whose perspectives are under-represented in the literature.

I also realise now the extent to which many of my conceptions about teaching and learning - which I tended also to lump together as a single phenomenon - were drenched in normative ideas from psychology that have percolated education as a whole, and the 'common sense rhetoric' that had evolved about working with adult learners (Tennant, 1988). Despite my work with people who felt disenfranchised in this country, I began with American middle class cultural ideals - influenced heavily by psychology - about the power of individual initiative, and self-directedness, believing that these would overcome most barriers to opportunity. I realise now the extent to which the social pasts of those who have been largely advantaged, rather than disadvantaged by education, are reproduced in much literature about adult learners.

I began with a conception of learning that was essentially dynamic, rather than passive; social, rather than merely individual. But I failed to recognise a whole range and complexity of forces with which learners interact, and through which their identities as learners are constituted. In the early stages, I would not have understood all sorts of nuances in Jarvis' argument that,

"...learning always occurs within a social context and that the learner is also to some extent a social construct, so that learning should be regarded as a social phenomenon as well as an individualistic one. " (Jarvis, 1987a, p. 15)

Although I had read the critique of psychology offered by Henriques et al (1984) I also would have tended to translate 'social' into something essentially personal or interpersonal.

Despite my extensive involvement with many white working class women, and with Black people who had become disaffected with the education system, I had not heard essential differences in their accounts of being learners in different kinds of situations. I tended to

translate their meanings into my interpretative frameworks and into broad and sanitised categorisations about adult learners and adult learning. In so doing, I had done an injustice to the nuances and complexities of their personal struggles as learners and to the differences which wove across our stories. I preferred only to hear commonalities.

This study has helped me to appreciate at a deep level how the experience of learning from someone - such as from the adults in my study - involves, as Salmon says (1980) learning something about his or her way of 'being in the world'. My own personal journey during the course of this research ^{has} confronted me with how that 'way of being' inevitably involves processes of conscious and unconscious selection of meanings, from a range of alternatives.

The epistemology, methodology and focus of this study ^{have} involved me in exploring, understanding describing and analysing personal meanings not just in other people's lives but also in my own. I have had to confront my own way of being in the world in relation to these adults' stories. I have had to reflect critically on patterns in my own life: how and why I have come to select and reject certain meanings and not others, in terms of how I have made sense of my own experiences as a learner, as well as those of others. In the course of this, much of my background, previously kept shrouded in intellectual mists and rationalised or internalised disjunctions, has become foreground. (Marshall, 1984) My involvement in this disciplined inquiry, in which critical reflexivity was central, now allows me to see how our constructions of reality can become,

"...dynamic frames which can limit our conceptual development if we choose not to exercise our responsibility for the creation of such frames. We are not inevitably limited by our world views. " (Pope, 1985, p. 11)

As a result of focusing on learners' meanings of learning, and their accounts of being learners over time, in different kinds of learning situations, I feel that the ground on which I once stood has been

fundamentally shifted. This has involved considerable struggle and pain, inevitable in any process of restructuring not just a few initial ideas but a complex nexus of centrally held assumptions, values and constructs. It feels as if I now interact with and understand the world from a very different personal stance.

My deeper understanding of my own story has enabled me to hear things in the stories of others that I had chosen not to hear before and to develop a more differentiated view about adult learning and adult learners. By the time I approached the final cross-case, cross-contextual analysis, the learning in which I had personally engaged, provided me with the benefits of binocular vision. This, Bateson (1978) suggests, affords two slightly different observations being compared and contrasted: "For this the eyes must not be too far apart (or else one will just see two separate pictures) and must not be too close together (or there will be no bonus)."

Rich (1972) speaks about 're-vision' - the "act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction."

I believe that my final analysis and the writing process itself has benefitted from both: a kind of binocular re-visioning.

8.3. On finding a voice

This study has enabled me to explore the theme of disjunction and integration, as it is allied to the notion of learner identity and possibility: not just in the public sphere, but in my own sphere. Re-examining myself and my own experience as a learner through the lens of adults' stories, and especially women's stories, I have discovered the riddle "that connects" (after Maxwell, 1984): namely, that "whether I am a woman or a man is [not] an interesting contingent statement about me, [but the] essential and interesting bedrock of my identity." (Elshtain, 1981, p. 37-8).

By grappling with the implications of that riddle, I have been helped to discover my own voice. I became more attuned to the kinds of circumstances that have given and can continue to give rise to my own voicefulness and voicelessness. I began to learn what kinds of actions I might take to enhance the possibility of integration, rather than disjunction, when I seek to express the bedrock of my identity, be it in spoken or written words. In turn, I came to better understand these themes in the context of others' stories.

8.4. A final 'knot of connectedness'.

In chapter 1, I began with my own story about what it has meant to learn and be a learner at different times in my own life. I offered this as a "little knot of connectedness." (Bateson, 1979) I now offer a final knot of connectedness.

In 1988, I was obliged to submit several chapters of this thesis to departmental examiners in order to be upgraded from M.Phil to PhD. At the time when I was struggling to overcome this hurdle with some kind of integrity, I read for the first time, Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own. It pierced me to my 'bedrock'. She gave voice to things that I had never dared express, since I might have been hurled into territories I had long skirted with great skill. Virginia Woolf helped me understand from a new perspective why the ground on which I tried to take up a personal stance (Salmon, 1989) could so easily shift beneath my feet; how and why the 'imagined judge' could so easily silence me. If 'they' are the authority', who was I to speak of these things?' the internal voice had long nagged.

She helped me to better understand the struggles I had had to find my own voice. In turn, her words encouraged me to trust in my voice and take the hurdle, on my own terms:

"As I watched her lengthening out for the test, I saw, but hoped that she did not see, the bishops and the deans, the doctors and the professors, the patriarchs and the pedagogues all at her shouting warning and advice. You can't do this and

you shan't do that.. And it was her trial to take her fence without looking to right or to left. If you stop to curse you are lost, I said to her; equally ,if you stop to laugh. Hesitate or fumble and you are done for. Think only of the jump. I implored her, as if I had put the whole of my money on her back."

Like a sentry, this passage introduced my submission.

Some months later, following my successful completion of this hurdle and on my fortieth birthday, my partner gave me a photograph of Virginia Woolf. He had sought out this passage, inscribing it at the bottom, since he knew its symbolic power for me in the context of the upgrading process . However, he had discovered the final line that I had altogether missed. And so, as I headed towards the final hurdle, I read at the bottom of my birthday present:

"And she went over it like a bird."

And so, with the sense of enhanced integration that that moment gave me, and remains symbolised by the completion of this thesis, I will pause before moving on.

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APPENDIX 1

DETAILS OF PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS
CYCLES 1-6
CYCLES 7 and 8

<u>Cycles</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>WC</u>	<u>MC</u>	<u>C?</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>Gp</u>	<u>Tk</u>	<u>Wr</u>	<u>C7</u>	<u>C8</u>
Cycle 1	16	9	17	5	3	6	19	14	14	14	7	0	5
Cycle 2	3	1	1	3	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	1
Cycle 3	3	0	1	2	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0
Cycle 4	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Cycle 5	12	0	9	3	0	0	12	8	4	0	0	6	2
Cycle 6	3	0	1	2	0	0	3	3	3	0	0	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>9</u>

Total numbers of follow up contacts

<u>Cycles</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>WC</u>	<u>MC</u>	<u>C?</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>Gp</u>	<u>Tk</u>	<u>Wr</u>
Cycle 7	6	0	6	0	0	0	6	6#	2	0	0
Cycle 8	6	3	6	3	0	3	6	2	0	3	6
<u>Totals</u>	<u>12*</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>

*Karen and Sally seen in both Cycles 7 and 8, and therefore counted twice.

Rita and Gaynor were seen for a group interview in cycle 6 and individual interviews in cycle 7 thus accounting for a total of 35 life story interviewees in Appendix 3.

APPENDIX 2a

KINDS OF LEARNING PROGRAMMES ATTENDED BY
STUDENTS INVOLVED IN CYCLES 1-8

Kinds of formal learning programmes being attended by students involved in life story interviews.

<u>Programme</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>WC</u>	<u>MC</u>	<u>C?</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>Total No.s</u>
Hillcroft Diploma	10	0	9	1	0	0	10	10
Hillcroft Return to Learn	4	0	2	2	0	0	4	4
Polytechnic Undergrad ¹	19	9	19	6	3	6	19	28
University Undergrad	4	0	3	1	0	0	4	4
Cont.Prof. Development Course	3	0	1	2	0	0	3	3
University Post-grad	3	3	1	1	0	1	1	<u>6</u>
Total:								55

¹ Including Nancy who left her polytechnic degree course just prior to our follow up interview

Footnote: The total number of formal learning programmes exceeds the number of individuals interviewed, since this table also incorporates learning situations at times of follow up interviews.

APPENDIX 2b

KINDS OF LEARNING PROGRAMMES ATTENDED BY
ADULTS INVOLVED IN LIFE STORY INTERVIEWS

Note: Participants and cycle during which they spoke from that perspective are given under appropriate institution.

Hillcroft Diploma

Gaynor, cycle 6
Rita, cycle 6
Karen, cycle 5
Susan, cycle 5
Marion, cycle 5
Victoria, cycle 5
Sally, cycle 5
Nancy, cycle 5
Penny, cycle 5
Nicole, cycle 5

University undergraduate

Karen, cycle 7 and 8
Susan, cycle 7
Sally, cycle 7 and 8
Janet, cycle 6 (previously Hillcroft)

University post-graduate

Amy, cycle 2
Raissa, cycle 2
Derek, cycle 2
Jane, cycle 2 and 8 (after leaving midway)
Peter, cycle 4
Godfrey, cycle 8

Return to Learning course

Gaynor, cycle 5
Rita, cycle 5

Continuing Professional Development course

Sheila, cycle 3
Nina, cycle 3
Pamela, cycle 3

Other

Peter, cycle 8 (Technical college)

Polytechnic undergraduate

Georgette, cycle 1
Nancy, cycle 6 (just after leaving)
Rhoda, cycle 1
Diane, cycle 1
Frank, cycle 1
Godfrey, cycle 1
Laurence, cycle 1
Todd, cycle 1
Patricia, cycle 1
Ethel, cycle 1
Alex, cycle 1
Connie, cycle 1 and 8 (after leaving)
Darcy, cycle 1
Fran, cycle 1
Vera, cycle 6 (previously Hillcroft)
Andrea, cycle 6 (previously Hillcroft)

APPENDIX 3

SUMMARY OF DETAILS RELATING TO EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS AND TRANSITION POINTS FOR THE 35 PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN LIFE STORY INTERVIEWS

The following information, when available, is provided in each case:

Name

Age upon leaving school

Type of school

Qualification(s)

Then...

Kinds of courses attended between leaving school and time of interview

Pattern of return

Type of formal learning institution to which return was made

n.k.= not known

Note: Rita and Gaynor were seen for a group interview in cycle 6 and a life story interview in cycle 7, thus accounting for a total of 35 life story interviewees.

1. Georgette:

17;grammar school/some O's/ married 19/ no courses/ direct entry/
Polytechnic, BSC/n.k.

2. Amy:

18/grammar/A's/B.Ed/M.Phil and employment/ counselling courses,
numerous CPD short courses/Direct Entry/university p.g.

3. Raissa:

18/grammar/A's/university and employment/2 year professional diploma,
numerous CPD short courses/Direct Entry/university post-graduate.

4. Derek:

18/grammar/A's/university degree, transfer to B.Ed/numerous short CPD
courses/direct entry/university p.g..

5. Sheila:

16/2ndary modern/ none/tech college and employment/ day release
qualification, numerous CPD short courses/direct entry/direct entry/ 8
week CPD course.

6. Nina:

17/grammar/none/homemaker/ SRN (not completed)/ after 30:Professional qualification (2 year)/ numerous CPD short courses/direct entry/8 week CPD course.

7. Pamela:

18/grammar/A's/ 1 year break and then university/ 2 year professional qualification, numerous CPD short courses/direct entry/8 week CPD course.

8.Jane:

16/grammar/3 O's/homemaker/ A level; after 30, Professional qualification (3 years), CPD courses/direct entry/university/change of career, did not complete course

9.Peter

18/grammar/A's/Employment/university u.g. degree/ direct entry/university p.g. (did not complete).

10.Gaynor

15/2ndary modern/none/homemaker/after 40: 2 O's, 1 A, Return to Learning/ Hillcroft diploma

11.Rita:

16/2ndary modern/3 O's/ employment, homemaker/(6 years social services support group)/Return to Learning/Hillcroft diploma

12.Karen

17/grammar scholarship)/O's/employment/after 30: 2 A's/ direct entry/Hillcroft diploma/university degree.

13.Susan

16/comp/CSE's/tech college/none/direct entry/Hillcroft diploma/university degree

14.Marion

15/comp/none/employment and homemaker/direct entry/Hillcroft/university degree.

15.Victoria:

16/2ndary modern/2 O's/employment,homemaker/WEA courses/direct entry

16.Sally:

16/girls 2ndary modern/none/art college, 3 weeks, employment,
homemaker/direct entry/Hillcroft and university undergraduate

17.Nancy:

126/grammar/ 2 O's/technical college, employment/direct
entry/Hillcroft/polytechnic degree (left).

18.Penny:

16/2ndary modern/none/sec college, employment; police training.
(homamker)after 35: Eng O/direct entry/Hillcroft

19.Nicole

16/convent/2 O's/homemaker with occasional jobs/TOPS course/direct
entry/Hillcroft diploma.

20.Rhoda

15/2ndary modern/none/unemployed/adult edu;Eng O level in 30's/access
course/polytechnic diploma.

21.Todd

15/ technical school/none/employment/ correspondence course, City and
Guild/direct entry

22.Diane:

15/grammar school/none/sec college, homemaker/counselling
training/direct entry (vis 2 weeks on O level course)/poly degree.

23.Frank:

15/comprehensive/none/employment/O's and A's/polytechnic degree.

24.Godfrey:

18/n.k./O's and A's/employment/day release, short courses/direct
entry/ polytechnic undergraduate and university post graduate

25.Janice

18/?/O's and A's/homemaker/day release, short courses/Diploma onto
Degree course after several weeks/polytechnic undergraduate

26.Laurence:

15/ secondary modern//none/army/in 40's:), A level/polytechnic degree

27. Patricia:

16/n.k./none/youth camp, Israel/counselling training/direct entry/polytechnic degree

28. Ethel:

17/secondary modern/O's/employment/ direct entry onto polytechnic degree via 3 weeks doing O level.

29. Alex

17/grammar/O's/nursing/A level in 30's/direct entry/ polytechnic degree

30. Connie:

16/2ndary modern/.none/sec course/homemaker/30's: O, A's/polytechnic degree

31. Darcy:

16/grammar/O's/tech college, homemaker/A level in 30's/ direct entry/polytechnic undergraduate

32. Fran:

15/secondary modern/RSA, Eng/Apprenticeship/none/direct entry/poly degree

33. Janet

3 O's/shop assistant, mixture of jobs, homemaker/none/direct entry/Hillcroft, university undergraduate

34. Vera

O level/teacher training planned but unable to take up, to library jobs/~~none~~/direct entry/Hillcroft, polytechnic undergraduate
/O level

35. Andrea

16/no qualifications/civil service/none/direct entry/Hillcroft, polytechnic undergraduate

APPENDIX 5

EXAMPLE OF FIELD RECORD

Field record: Frank: You see, at school, I had always been known as an underachiever. I was told that but I didn't believe it. I also had a block on maths.

Q: I asked him why he thought that was?

F: I remember in primary school and a time when I couldn't do a simple addition. A teacher made fun of me. From that time on, I shut off completely.

Reflection: By this point, Frank was talking fairly openly. Still somewhat hesitant in elaborating but non verbal reflection, and the fact that I could be seen to be taking 'indiscriminate' notes seemed to encourage him.

Theoretical note: This reinforces previous experiences of adults carrying with them back into formal learning painful memories of teachers who, through sarcasm, ridicule, and sometimes open sadistic cruelty, leave scars that adult learners bring back with them into formal and nonformal learning environments. [note: reference to experience of 'trainer training' with working class adults, where reflection on prior experiences of learning provided the starting point for training]

Methodological notes: I had been concerned about taking notes, as if 'shorthand' but as always, found it not a difficulty to listen, maintain eye contact and reflect/encourage as necessary. However, the energy involved in taking down 'everything' is immense, but I feel this is essential to ensure credibility with interviewee. I also feel happier about people glancing at what I am taking down to be reassured about my not censoring, which is not possible with a tape recorder. (Cityside, Interview F, card 6, 8-2-85)

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION, CITYSIDE

SUSAN WEIL: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS

DEPARTMENT:

DAYS SUSAN WEIL WILL BE AVAILABLE
FOR DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS:

I am currently working at the Centre for Staff Development in Higher Education, London University, on a research project for which I am doing some exploratory work at NELP within four departments.

I am interested in learning more about mature students' (approximately age 30 and upwards) previous experience of learning within different contexts. These would include initial schooling and any other learning undertaken within the formal education system (e.g. further, adult, etc)

However, I am particularly interested in learning engaged in outside of these institutions. These would include experience of workshops, informal learning groups, training courses, or organised discussions run by, for example, community development groups, voluntary or professional organisations, local authorities, etc. (I refer to these as 'nonformal learning opportunities')

I am equally interested in your experiences of managing your own learning either in a systematic way or informally. I often refer to these as either "self managed" or "independent" learning, these would include experiences of identifying a learning goal, problem, need or wish to learn more about something. For example, the need or wish to learn may have been stimulated by your social role (e.g. as a parent, or a community member), by your work role, or out of general interest. You might have then pursued your learning needs or interests in a whole variety of ways. These might have included meeting with "wise friends", family, local experts", or colleagues, reading books, seeking out information through organised groups, finding opportunities for informal discussion about your learning needs or interests, using tapes and films, going out into the community to investigate, etc.

The reasons why I would like to discuss these many experiences of learning with you, is not to find out what you learned but rather how you experienced learning, and the discovery of knowledge in its widest sense, in different situations. I hope to raise questions such as, what factors made it easier for you to learn generally and within different settings? What did learning mean to you within various settings? What factors contributed to you experiencing learning as challenging and exciting? When was learning not a positive experience? What skills and qualities do you think are necessary in a "good teacher"? Who are some of the "good teachers" you have identified outside the formal learning system? In what ways have you been discouraged from pursuing a learning goal or interest? How do you usually know you have learned something? What does "knowledge" mean to you? Does it mean different things in different contexts? Why do you think this is etc?

2.

I am particularly - but not exclusively - interested in speaking with students who feel they have experiences to describe as learners which, either directly or indirectly, you believe have been influenced by your gender, race, class, culture and/or age. Each of these areas remain an active focus for my own "self managed learning" and have been so for many years. These realities also continue to generate learning about myself as well as the complex ways in which they can affect interaction with individuals and institutions within our society. As a white American woman, in the later half of her 30's who has been living and working within London for just over 10 years, this learning has been on many levels and has taken a variety of directions and forms-particularly with regards to gender, race and culture.

As we work together to identify and consider different aspects of our previous learning experiences, I would then like to explore ways in which you believe these affected your expectations of teaching and learning within higher education, and your actual experiences of pursuing a course of study as a mature student. Due to limitations of time at this stage, I would especially like to meet with SECOND YEAR and POST EXPERIENCE FOURTH YEAR OR POST GRADUATE STUDENTS.

The ultimate aim of this study is to identify, through similar activities in a variety of institutions of higher education, ways in which the information and understanding gained through discussions with many mature students be used as a basis for staff development in institutions which are likely to be increasing their intake of adult learners in the near future. Therefore, my aim is not to look at ... [your institution, or course].

My plan to be available within your department on the days indicated at the top of this letter. Please also feel free to approach me individually or in small groups to chat informally and in a relaxed way about these areas of interest.

PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK ME ANY QUESTIONS BEFORE FEELING YOU WISH TO ENGAGE IN DISCUSSION. ALL CONVERSATIONS WILL REMAIN FULLY CONFIDENTIAL. What you have to say, rather than who you are, is what is important to this research. Although I will need your names to keep a record, these will be referred to only by myself.

Thank you. I look forward to meeting you in the near future.

P.S. PLEASE TELL OTHERS ABOUT THESE DISCUSSIONS IN CASE THEY HAVE NOT SEEN THIS LETTER. (Many thanks)

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION, CYCLES 1-6

LEARNING NOW, LEARNING THEN: ADULT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING
AND BEING A LEARNER OVER TIME - INSIDE AND OUTSIDE FORMAL EDUCATION

Adult learners who:

- are currently doing a 'formal course' of some type
- have not had any experience of formal education (further, higher) or of a substantial course (ie more than one week) which has been organised by another person in 5 years
- may be willing to be interviewed, individually or in a group, as part of a research project which is looking at adults' experiences of learning, and of being a learner over time

Susan Weil, Centre for Staff Development, University of London, Institute of Education
the research, and the focus of the interviews

currently speaking to many different adults who have made the decision to take a formal course of some kind. We use this current position as the basis for reflecting on your experiences of being a learner at different times in your life. At the beginning of each interview - individual or group - I shall explain the structure which I shall use to elicit thoughts, with a minimum of interference from me. The structure will enable us to explore the extent to which, and how, you believe previous experiences of learning may have contributed to the ways in which you see yourself, and your learning needs now - at the point of taking this interview.

The interview is therefore a personal exploration of what learning, being a learner means, and what is important to you personally. We shall by no means be restricted to your memories of formal education. I shall also want to look at the different forms 'being a learner' may have taken for you outside formal education, and ways in which you relate or compare these experiences to 'being a learner' in formal education - as a child, as an adult.

particularly - but not exclusively - interested in speaking with men and women students experiences of learning, and being a learner may have been influenced by their gender, , social class, culture and/or other dimensions of experience/identity.

y, I prefer to spend approximately 90 minutes with an individual or a group. I shall both otes, and tape the interviews - on the understanding that anonymity will be maintained in ng I write, or discuss about this research. We shall begin by discussing any questions, arifying the ways in which we shall proceed to explore these areas. As indicated above, m of these sessions are not for me to impose pre-determined ideas on you, but rather to ut from you your perceptions, your interpretations of your experiences of being a learner ferent contexts during your life. If I introduce an idea, it is because it has arisen nterviews with another/others, and I wish to explore your perceptions of its relevance U as a learner.

rpose of this research is to deepen understanding about adult learners and adult ng in different contexts over time. Learners' perspectives can influence the development ining and staff development programmes and activities for those who are working with i in different learning contexts.

you in advance for any contribution you may be willing to make to my explorations in areas.

Weil

ry, 1986

APPENDIX 8

MEETING STUDENTS:
THE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AS A STARTING
POINT

Examples from Field Notes

Field record: ([Diane] as approached by [Ed] the course tutor. He asked if she would mind being interviewed by me, since I was interested in 'mature students'. She said, 'Fine. I am definitely mature!' (with a sense of humour) and that she was free for a while. (2/85). Diane, the first person I interviewed individually at Cityside, from Department 3, introduced me to a number of students in her network of friends. This comprised about half of the mature students on her course, as well as some second year students whom I also interviewed. One of the third year students was Ethel, who, in turn, arranged a meeting with some other third year students. She indicated to me that she would not have bothered, nor would they have agreed [it was exam time by now], unless she had told them that I was 'all right' and it was 'interesting'. [Several weeks later] Ethel drove me to Georgette's house where I was also able to meet Fran. After tea and some clarification about who I was, whereby I was doing the study, etc, they began by reflecting on their experience of the course itself, and if and why it had been worthwhile, in terms of their expectations and experiences. I gradually encouraged them to talk about their previous experiences, within and outside formal education. (May, 1985)

Field record Godfrey rang me soon after I arrived home from Cityside. I mentioned that I was having difficulty gaining access to Department 2...He said that he would be happy to link me with other third and fourth year students...Since he was ringing to ask myself and my partner to dinner, he suggested he ask some other students around as well. Since it was 'social', he suggested that I wouldn't be going behind anyone's back. Agreed to this, with appreciation for his help. (I, 2, G; February, 1985)

CYCLE 7/FOLLOWING UP STUDENTS
LETTER SENT VIA HILLCROFT
ADMINISTRATOR

Susan Veil
2 Taviton Street
London WC1H 0BT
Telephone: (01)380 0599 (work)
(01)208 0115 (home/answerphone)

1987

Year! I hope that you will remember me. We met last year in you were at Hillcroft. We spent time together, during which some of your experiences and personal meanings about , 'being a learner' - in and out of school, over the course of

me, you may recall that we discussed the possibility of my up on that conversation this year, to explore what other s and thoughts you may have had about learning and being a nce that time. As before, I am not interested in achievement, uation of any course you may be undertaking. Instead, my aim ore some of the personal ways you experience learning in learning environments - formal or informal!

ld like to suggest is that we meet again -either at Hillcroft as indicated on the other letter), or if this is not possible, her time and place in the near future. What I propose to do is ou a copy of some of the themes and issues which arose in our conversation. This would give you the opportunity to share your thoughts and comments on the direction and content of our discussion, both generally and from the perspective of your situation. It would be helpful if we could spend approximately s together. If we do meet at Hillcroft, and you arrive prior to ng time, I can give you the transcripts to read before we d you can scribble on them as you wish!

hope that this activity would be as interesting and useful to know it will be to me and my research. If you have any whatsoever, or you want to arrange an alternative time to ase ring me - day or evening - as soon as possible.

in anticipation for your participation and support in the this research.

wishes,

APPENDIX 10

CYCLE 8: CHECKING FOR CREDIBILITY AND MEANINGFULNESS OF DRAFT SUMMARY OF FINAL ANALYSIS

(Note: for the purposes of this appendix, this has been laid out in a different way from the original to reduce space; the text remains the same)

I. General Introduction to the Study

This study involved me in speaking with many adults about their experiences of being a learner, in different contexts, over the course of their lives - inside and outside the educational system. The main theme which links the many different stories, and the four main analysis chapters together, is what I refer to as 'disjunction and integration' (See Section II) The thread of the story in the analysis is about the influence of prior learning on adults expectations and experiences of higher education.

A. Who was in the Study and how it was carried out

Individual interviews and group discussions or interviews held between January, 1985 and 1988 were the primary means of gathering information for the study.

The individual interviews were carried out with 34 adults in different learning situations (e.g. under-graduate and post-graduate degree courses in different colleges, polytechnics and universities; an 8 week post-experience professional development training course; diploma courses, etc) Some adults were followed up as they moved from, for example, an diploma based access type course to a degree course.)

Amongst the 34 people interviewed individually, nineteen defined themselves as working class; nine as middle class; six as somewhere in between or uncertain. All but five were women; two were Black.

The group interviews and discussions involved an additional 14 people. Four were Black; nine were women; all but one of the fourteen defined themselves as working class. There are also detailed field notes based on the observation of a conference on racism, in which the perspectives of additional black and white students were recorded.

B. Feedback and 'checking out' as central to the study all along

Some adults have been interviewed several times, over the course of several years. All the way through I have tried to find different groups of people whose experience might either challenge or further develop the themes that emerged with another group. So, all the way through, I would be checking out what came out of speaking with one group with another. I have also at times asked for direct comments. For example, some people in the study read and commented on a paper I wrote earlier this year. Many new insights emerged from this process. Their participation was invaluable to the development of my own thinking, and helped to guide the final analysis.

C. Your contribution at this final stage: how and why

Now, however, I have completed the analysis and have written up the main chapters. I am now returning to a number of you for the first time with a summary of the key themes that have come out of all the material on which the study is based.

Your comments will form a section on its own, at the end of the analysis and before my overall final discussion of the study's outcomes. My intention is to use your own words, in whatever form you choose to offer them to me! Scribbles in margins of these summary sheets, and on the transcripts of our original discussions are welcome.

Please feel free to say 'Yes! this is me!' or 'No, this makes no sense in terms of my experience and this is why'. These kinds of immediate responses will be especially helpful at this stage. Alternatively, rather than responding to individual bits, you may wish to jot down your thoughts on the analysis as a whole, letting whatever comes to mind flow onto a sheet of paper.

In other words, I am not seeking well formulated essays! Just reflections, thoughts, ideas, and anything else triggered by what is (and isn't!) here, in **WHATEVER FORM MAKES IT EASIEST FOR YOU TO FEEL INVOLVED!** You may also wish to comment on any changes in your perceptions or experiences of being a learner or learning, since we last met. As long as I can read what you give me, I promise to do my best to do justice to it in this special chapter. If a book comes out of this whole thing, as I plan now, I shall also be coming back to you to see if you would like me to acknowledge you at the beginning by name (obviously keeping your specific contributions anonymous).

D. A reminder about my purposes in doing this research

It is perhaps useful to remind you that I did not set out to **PROVE** anything. My intention has been to map the complexity of some of the issues we need to consider in relation to the adults' experience of learning, and the influence of prior learning on how they make sense of returning to higher education.

E. Doing research **WITH** people, not **ON** people

I look forward to hearing what strikes chords in your own experience and what doesn't. Do not hesitate to challenge, express doubts, or confront me with new questions!! That is the essence of the kind of study I have tried to undertake. The messy bits and the loose ends often provide the most important clues to what questions we need to ask.

This process of feedback and consultation with you is for me the essence of what it means to do research **WITH** people, rather than **ON** people! My hope is that you will feel free to react as yourselves, in whatever words and methods that suit you!

ONCE AGAIN, MANY THANKS FOR YOUR HELP IN THIS. I look forward to hearing from you before November 10th.

II. A Word about my use of the terms, 'Disjunction' and 'Integration' - the key issue which this study explores

(This may be clearer after reading the Chapter summaries)

A. Disjunction

Disjunction refers to a sense of feeling at odds as a learner learning in particular sets of circumstances. This feeling can be linked to who one is, where one is, the interactions and relationships being experienced, or how this experience relates to previous or other experiences (such as at school or at home)

Disjunction can be associated with a sense of alienation, anger, frustration, confusion. In some situations, people blame themselves for what is happening. Others find (by chance or deliberately) people who support them through, or help them make sense of what is happening. Still others use other strategies to manage disjunction.

If and how a learner experiences disjunction in a learning environment will be seen to be tied up with many things. For example: the influence of previous learning, one's self concept and self esteem as a learner at that time in one's life; the quality of the relationships available; the kinds of compensating experiences available at the time.

Disjunction can also be recalled positively. In other words, it can be remembered as the starting point in a significant learning experience or change. For example, when people push you to the limits of your boundaries with plenty of support and caring.

B. Integration

Integration, on the other hand, is associated with a sense of wholeness ; feeling at one as a learner in a particular learning environment; feeling a sense of connectionn a particular learning environment. It can, but need not be, associated with intensely positive feelings about being a learner or learning in particular kinds of situations or teaching-learning relationships. A sense of integration can also come from learning experiences that aren't necessarily exceptional, but seem somehow to compensate for previous experiences that were largely characterised by disjunction and have left scars.

The many senses of 'integration' and 'disjunction' as used in this study will hopefully come clearer through the summaries of the key patterns suggested by the data outlined below.

CHAPTER SIX:
DOMINANT THEMES IN ADULTS' RECOLLECTIONS OF
LEARNING DURING THEIR SCHOOL YEARS

Summary, 10/88

1. Intro

This chapter is concerned with peoples' memories of learning at school, and outside of school.

2. Home and School

2.1. Meanings of learning at home

A number of class related patterns are suggested by adults' accounts of learning in their family and social context. Working class adults tended to associate learning with living and working together - with parents, brothers and sisters and friends. Such learning was recalled as just something that happened by virtue of being together. In general, it was reported as not structured or organised, or seen as related to school. For example:

"learning to be independent"
"Learning to help one another"
"Just through living"
"Learning through doing useful things, such as painting a room or fixing things"

In other words, learning was equated with 'life' and doing things rather than school.

Middle class adults references to learning outside school focused largely on organised or structured activities that they attended, or engaged in, on their own, or with parental guidance. A great deal of learning in middle class homes was recalled as directly related to 'doing well at school' or pleasing adults. School, not home, was seen then as the place where learning 'happened'. At home, learning meant activity related to books, such as reading and looking things up. It also referred to organised activities, such as ballet, piano, etc.

Everything I did was related to school
We didnt really learn anything in a group at all
Learning was school and working hard.
Going to ballet, piano, etc

Adults who defined themselves as working class but came from families that had 'middle class aspirations' would refer to both kinds of patterns.

"working in a shop" and learning about our culture
"My dad taught me to learn things for myself; didnt want school to kill learning for me.
Practical but also reading. Books and comics"
Getting a job, and managing money
'Not sitting down learning but more being given experiences and having experiences related to me that formed me - But it was an ongoing thing'

In some cases, the pressures exerted by parents to do well and 'rise above' one's class could be a source of disjunction.

2.2. The transition from home to school

Many people in the study recalled this transition vividly. For some, this transition felt 'natural', although they may have been anxious at the beginning. They saw learning at home or with their parents as little different from what happened at school. Others reported a very different experience, characterised largely by disjunction.

Reading stood out for many as a site of struggle, and their first experience of disjunction in learning. For example: a number referred to knowing how to read before going to school, but upon arrival at school, they had experiences such as not being believed; being too scared to tell teachers; or being considered disruptive because they could read. For some adults, the impact of this experience was seen to have affected their orientation to schooling considerably.

2.3. Learning inside, learning outside: questions of relevance

Here a class related pattern is suggested again. A concern with relevance interwove with many working class adults' memories of schooling, whereas for middle class adults', this did not emerge as something which was as much 'at issue' for them in the same way. Is this because middle class young people experience less disjunction in relation to their their experience of learning across home and school boundaries?

I never saw school as being part of what living was about and that was it and it didn't relate much to the real world to me. Not to my real world at any rate. I didn't see much at all, didn't see any point to it. ..Why do they expect you to do all these abstract things?

School was useless...like a prison, a place where I had to go. I wanted to be a hairdresser and everything had to fit into that. ..

Others spoke about wanting to escape, to get a job, to start living, etc

Whereas for others, mainly middle class adults, learning in the home reinforced and supported the kind of learning that was expected at school. Learning at school took you towards something such as jobs, status, career, fulfillment. Whereas for others, learning at school at this stage was seen to take them away from the 'business of living'.

Learning that school was seldom, if at all relevant to the outside world, seemed to be critical to how adults anticipated, and came to terms with formal education later.

3. Teachers

Few people spoke about informal teachers, other than parents, during the period of initial education. Two key themes emerge here:

the significant impact of particular teachers and the extent to which they were recalled as either contributing to or undermining one's self esteem and self-concept as a learner.

learning climates that either encouraged or discouraged learning

3.1. The power of particular teachers

Teachers were recalled generally as particularly powerful to the extent that they could bolster or undermine a learner's fragile self esteem in ways that had repercussions beyond the classroom. People spoke about feeling capable in one class only to feel stupid and a trouble maker in another.

My performance used to swing according to what the teacher said about my performance

If I hit it off I did well, If not, I didn't

They were also those who were remembered as powerfully reinforcing , or alternatively, counteracting, the effect of earlier labelling, by school or home.

The theme of 'we respond and become as we are seen and related to' comes across in one account after another.

Middle class women in particular spoke about internalising a great deal: e.g. feeling like a failure. They also spoke about fear of failure, lest they disappoint parents and teachers.. Going directly on to college or university was seen as an opportunity to 'prove' something to oneself, and others. For some, it afforded the chance to rectify previous experience of disjunction at school.

On the whole, few people remembered more than one or two 'good teachers' . These were remembered as the ones who had actively encouraged them. These teachers tended to be recalled as people who made learning 'feel easy' or made the student 'feel capable'. Their encouragement, enthusiasm and capacity to relate to students as people and draw out their potential were commonly cited characteristics. Teachers had particular power when students were moving from one learning environment to another - such as primary to secondary school, or one school to another. Similar perceptions of 'good teachers' recurred across all accounts.

For those students whose experience at school , and school-home, was characterised largely by disjunction, such teachers could have a particularly powerful impact, in their capacity to compensate and repair damaged self-esteem and confidence.

3.2. Climates for and against learning

Descriptions of 'learning climates' also were associated with how the power of teachers. Climates refer to what it felt like to be in a particular class room: fear or acceptance; encouraged or discouraged; drawn out or shut down. Climates were recalled as having had a significant impact on learners' willingness and capacity to learn in that particular subject area or classroom.

Maths came up repeatedly as a subject remembered in relation to the climate of a classroom. Accounts of sarcasm, humiliation, slapping for making errors were sadly frequent:

'I was much too paralysed to say, Hey I don't understand'

'I had one teacher who hit me. From then on I was bottom of the class'

'This teacher slapped my legs and consequently I was frightened to death'.

Classrooms and school climates that inhibited learning, and set up a sense of disjunction in the learner and in her or his relationship with that learning environment were often associated with arbitrary uses (abuses) of power. Fierce competitiveness also discouraged some.

Climates that were positively associated with learning were marked by dialogue and understanding, and being made to feel capable and valued.

4. Coming to Know

This refers to the process of understanding who one is in the social world in which we find ourselves. This section concerns 'coming to know' in relation to gender, race and social class, as described in adults' stories of their primary and secondary education between 1940 and 1955.

4.1. Becoming aware of differences

What emerges most poignantly from many of the accounts of adults who regarded themselves as working class or working/middle class, was how an awareness of differences was forced upon them from an early age, by teachers and the educational system itself. A number spoke about how accent was a focus of ridicule or reproach by teachers and peers. Some felt their accent set up low expectations on the parts of teachers, causing them to be 'written off', or labelled as 'deviants' (e.g. troublemaker)

For example:

"You cannot spell because of your accent. You speak badly. You cannot expect to be able to spell. "

(re being put in A stream with middle class kids) I was picked on for my accent, my grammar...I was mocked for my pronunciation. They insinuated I was promiscuous.'

There were those who did not experience class as an issue at primary school, particularly if they were largely with others a similar class identity. For a number, the transition to secondary marked the start of a whole new education in class differences. Middle class adults spoke about their difficulties in largely working class schools; working class adults spoke about their sense of disjunction if they moved into schools or classes largely populated by middle class young people. Questions of identity and loyalties (to family and friends) were often a source of great struggle and confusion. One person summarised the feelings of a number of working class adults by describing her perception of the middle class teachers as 'aliens from another planet'. A strong sense of disjunction in relation to that learning environment could result: feeling detached or at odds with who they were and their environment.

4.2. Managing disjunction

Such experiences could provoke considerable frustration and anger. It also could provoke, or exacerbate, a sense of disjunction in relation to being a learner in that classroom or that school. In a number of cases, adults spoke about becoming more disruptive, since that was all that seemed to be expected.

In contrast, many middle class adults accounts conveyed a sense of 'feeling all of a piece' between home and school and at school. There was a qualitatively different feel about their accounts - even amongst those who disliked school or had not been particularly academically successful. What did stand out was the extent to which they tended to see any difficulties they had as due to a failure in them, or their intelligence. This pattern was strongly class-related, and tended to be absent in most working class adults' accounts of their difficulties. The assumption tended to be that they could do well if they tried. Does this reflect their implicit understanding of school as a place designed for middle class children to do well?? ("Obviously if I had paid attention...";) There were also exceptions to this, which are described in the thesis.

It seemed that for those whose experiences of learning at school were characterised largely by disjunction, there were fewer opportunities to develop resilience or trust in their own possibilities as people and as learners at school. Many working class adults' accounts conveyed their feelings of resignation at this time, although a few felt sufficiently angry to keep on fighting to succeed. There were also those who were fortunate in the numbers of compensating influences they had, in terms of home, relationships and other opportunities to feel capable and valued.

5. Conclusion

What comes across most powerfully across this entire chapter is the extent to which the ability and willingness to do well at school cannot be ascertained solely on the basis of individual characteristics, such as motivation, intelligence, or personality. This however has remained a basic assumption in most studies of teaching and learning, and academic achievement.

The social context in which the learner operates, and the nature of his or her interaction with it, comes across in these accounts as of equal, if not greater importance to young peoples' capacity and willingness to learn at (engage with) school.

CHAPTER SEVEN SUMMARY: ALTERNATIVE FORMS AND PROCESSES

1.Intro

This chapter is concerned with adults' experiences of learning outside the formal education system, after leaving school. Such learning experiences may be associated with for example, raising a family; learning at work; through significant relationships; courses; womens groups; community work; political activity, etc, etc, etc!

2. Meanings of learning outside formal education

There were subtle class-related differences suggested by the learning activities cited in response to my questions about being a learner, learning

outside formal education. In general, middle class adults tended to find it more difficult to think about examples that they would associate with learning outside formal education. In their accounts, there were many more examples of task based, or structured/organised activity: for example, adult education classes; activity groups; music or art lessons. Travel was mentioned by one. Others spoke about courses associated with their work or profession. Still others had attended counselling training courses. Some women spoke about learning in association with raising their family. There was a feeling, however, of 'forcing the issue' when urged to cite learning experiences after leaving school. There was a taken for grantedness about other kinds of learning. Like, is that REALLY learning? Isn't that just something you do? Or, being a parent, was seen as personal development, and somehow separate from 'learning'. 'Learning', and the meanings they ascribed to it, seemed to remain associated with formal education.

For those women who, through marriage or career, moved into more middle class life styles, similar perceptions were suggested by their accounts. With them, however, there seemed to be a different meaning: namely, that such learning just wasn't valued, and was associated with a gradual erosion of confidence and self-esteem.

On the other hand, working class adults in the study were more likely to speak about learning as something that continued to be associated with experience - living, working, struggle - outside education. In particular, a number spoke about their determination to find experiences that would compensate for the disjunction they had experienced at school. The need and active search for stimulation, dialogue, challenge was considerable in many accounts. For some people, these efforts led to concrete discoveries about themselves as learners, and new meanings for learning that were to influence their subsequent expectations and experiences as mature students.

3. Patterns of Discovery

Discovery is a very powerful theme that recurred in a significant number of working class adults stories about learning and being learners after leaving school. The sense of 'discovery' was conveyed in descriptions of their experience of alternative forms and processes of learning which contrasted sharply with school experiences. Alternatively, it was connected with experiences that led to new insights about themselves as learners. These helped to counteract earlier disjunction or led to a new sense of integration. Discovery was associated with an active repairing of confidence and self-esteem as a learner. It also entailed affirmation and a kind of validation, that compensated for prior experience. For example,

'Hey I'm not stupid!'.
'Maybe it wasn't me that was the problem!'

Accounts of experiences that conveyed this active sense of discovery suggested that new meanings of learning, and a new sense of possibility as a person or as a learner, had emerged, as a result. These new meanings and new perceptions of themselves as learners will be seen to have a significant influence on subsequent expectations and experiences of higher education.

Overall, accounts of 'discovery' conveyed a sense of integration, in that these experiences compensated for the scars left by previous ones, and/or positively established new expectations of learning.

3.1. Discovery as the result of disjunction

For some, painful life crises or transitions such as divorce, death, redundancy, or changing countries unexpectedly marked the beginning of a discovery process. Women especially spoke about moving from feeling 'squished' or 'squashed' or 'smashed' (words that I heard time and time again in women's stories) to becoming more confident. Such movements seemed to be cyclical, however, since they often described falling back again into a sense of feeling they had little worth. Others spoke about getting increasingly angry, and more and more determined to find ways of meeting their development/learning needs. There also were accounts of struggles to find experiences that might counteract the negative impact of teachers, parents, white people (in the case of black people) and fathers or husbands, in the case of women.

Moving from disjunction into a 'discovery cycle' almost always depended upon significant relationships. These were associated with valuing, dialogue and positive challenge. Such relationships were immensely important in enabling these adults to move from disjunction into discovery, given that their confidence was still largely determined by outside forces, rather than by internal ones.

In such stories, very powerful accounts indeed, there is a continual theme about the extent to which self-esteem was still largely dependent upon the approval and encouragement of others. It could zoom up or down like a barometer out of control, but gradually, with many 'building up experiences' a greater resilience resulted, entailing centredness and confidence in oneself.

3.2. Cycles of discovery

There were also accounts of discovery that resulted from chance experiences and relationships. In these cases, discovery did not begin with disjunction, but could lead to new disjunctions, such as in relationships with partners and family.

For example, one woman spoke about becoming involved in the miners strike:

'Yeah, that's me, That's the real world!...Stimulating. I felt as though I could actually be in charge of my life. ..It actually woke me up...I really started to wake up. '

This enthusiasm and involvement contrasted sharply with her description of being at school:

I never saw 'school as being part of what living was about. '

A number of women spoke about their discovery of new meanings of learning, and new possibilities for themselves as learners, in women's groups:

"But at least you didn't feel threatened in any way....It was nice having that, to share things, that you felt, that other felt, and 'Gosh, I'm not mad. I'm not stupid. I am not alone. We are together on this. I think it was very exciting and stimulating. "

"I do remember a time when I was into learning more about women. A friend had just recommended some books to me, such as by _____. This triggered me...But I (now) have this terrific enthusiasm to learn. Sometimes I read and say that was awful but I really enjoy learning. That's why it hurts so much when it gets put down. There are so many different ways to learn!"

Another spoke about finding a 'mentor', who encouraged her to read, discuss and return to do 0 levels:

"I remember discovering George Orwell: ROAD TO CATALONIA. I went crazy. I wanted more!..

Another started learning more about the history and culture of his local community, beginning with a search for the origins of the name of his regular pub. This was a man who had left school at 15 unable to read or write.

Cycles of discovery, entailing disjunction and integration, dragging in their wake experiences of feeling 'with and without a rudder' seemed to be a theme in accounts of any significant learning, regardless of the learning context.

Many of these adults had left school with a perception of learning inside school as separate from life, fragmented, unrelated and fraught with disjunction. But these 'discovery experiences' seemed to help them establish a new sense of themselves as learners, and to build their confidence. A new basis for making decisions about subsequent learning seems to have been established, and perhaps enabled these adults to feel more able to take up the option of higher education, once it presented itself.

Finally, what came across strongly in these accounts of discovery and learning outside the system was that learning became increasingly associated with particular kinds of feelings, processes, and relationships, rather than a place (such as formal education) or type of learning experience ('a course'). This will later be seen to have particular meaning, in relation to subsequent expectations and experiences of learning in higher education.

CHAPTER 8:
BECOMING A MATURE STUDENT: TRANSITIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Summary, 10/88

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on how and why opportunities for learning and development outside the formal education system can become regarded as insufficient to meet felt needs as a learner. The accounts enable us to examine how and why higher education emerges as an option. The complexity of circumstances and patterns of transition back into higher education becomes more apparent. In particular, the stories suggest some of the conditions that coalesce to create the likelihood of a return (Discovery being one factor, already discussed in Chapter 7).

Throughout, the meanings, of learning, the anxieties, the expectations (or lack of them) about higher education, become more apparent. The chapter ends with a 'word collage' which highlights the various ways in which adults anticipate their experience of returning to study. The stories of working class adults in Chapter 7 who experienced 'discovery', are now supplemented with those of both middle and working class women who worked largely inside their homes, or in low-paid jobs, and by those who shall be referred to as 'the professionals'.

2. Why? The conditions for returning

2.1. Women at home

The transition back to higher education by women who worked largely inside their homes over many years, working and middle class, seems to have been fuelled primarily by an increasing sense of disjunction in their lives. This relates to a growing feeling of 'being at odds' with their home environment. Across all their accounts, insufficient stimulation and challenge from their experiential learning also helped to create the conditions for the return. They reported a growing need for dialogue and expressions of respect that would help to repair their low self-esteem and confidence:

I read. Particularly history. But I had no one to talk about it with. I was always talking to myself. You kept thinking that your ideas were all wrong.

I was so sick and tired of working for people with so little intelligence and experience. It was a feeling of desperation.

I felt totally frustrated. I had tried lots of things but none had worked...I felt I had nothing of worth. I felt, 'I'm a cabbage.'

When I married, I just assumed I would do whatever my husband wanted to do. ..But then I began to think, do I want to spend the rest of my life doing things?...I had to do something for my own satisfaction.

It was only as I think I matured and the children grew older that I became myself and began to look at the outside and began to question this relationship.

I had a nice family, nice home, nice husband, but I was pretty fed up...and suddenly I realised that there were going to be lots of years and I had to do something and that is when I began to have regrets.

2.2. Dead end jobs

The same wavering confidence, and the sense of feeling 'constricted', despite peaks of discovery for some through experiential learning, comes across in the accounts of working and middle class adults who were in low-paid, low-status jobs. Here, the need for increased stimulation and challenge is still strong, but a vocational dimension to the need becomes apparent. For example:

[My job] was getting very mundane and there was nothing else I could do. I'd trained for it. So difficult.

Here, and above, there is consistent pattern of frustration with the dead-end nature of their employment and home situations and the need for stimulation and dialogue. What we do not see clearly defined are the vocational aims. In most research into mature students however, vocational motives are cited as the primary aim.

2.3. People in crisis

This theme further illustrates the complexity of conditions that propel a return to higher education, and extends some of the issues introduced in Chapter 7. Isolation, personal crisis, redundancy and marriage breakdowns were often important factors in stimulating personal re-evaluation and the opportunity to change.

Over and over again, women speak about men - husbands and fathers - as threatened by, begrudging and dismissive of their engagements as learners.

2.4. 'Moving out of or away from' and 'moving towards'

Two broad tendencies came across overall in the accounts of transition. Adults seemed either to be largely moving away from or out of a particular situation, or they seemed to be concerned with moving towards something quite different.

The accounts above are largely characterised by the descriptor, 'moving out of' or away from. Although these adults may have had generalised hopes for personal development and wider employment choice, the impetus for their return is lodged very much in the 'here and now' and the past of their lives, rather than in the future. As will be discussed in Section 4 of this chapter, many of the above found it impossible to think beyond gaining access to higher education, much less getting some higher qualification. They were more preoccupied with surviving such an endeavour. Moreover, few of the above consciously chose higher education or even considered it as an

option. As will be illustrated below, where I focus on the 'how' of the return, the conditions of their lives may have been ripe for a friend to suggest a course, or for them to follow up a television programme or something they saw in a library. But these circumstances arose more chance than by conscious design.

Those who were dissatisfied with their employment situations were also concerned with moving out of those, and towards something else. But the 'how' was more obscure. They too tended to stumble over higher education as an option, rather than plan for it actively within some kind of career strategy.

In many of the above accounts, the following kinds of perceptions were common:

people doing degrees are not 'people like me'.
higher education is not for people like me

2.5. The professionals: moving towards

Only a minority in this study actively regarded and sought out higher education as a clear choice. They can be referred to as the 'professionals'. Two out of this group saw themselves as working class. These adults carefully chose their course, and had tended to consider it within the context of an overall career and personal development strategy. Although there is some indication of 'movement away from/out of', the conditions of this group's return can be better described as 'movement towards'. Both vocational and personal development outcomes were clearly expected from the course. Like most adults in studies of returning and mature student participation in higher education, they had had a great deal of previous experience with education. For many of them also, their identity as learners was tied up with formal education, in contrast to those who discovered a sense of possibility as a learner outside education.

It took 18 months to decide on which course.

I would have been back two years previously, but I was promoted and turned down for secondment. They held the place for me...I wanted to get back into an intellectually stimulating environment.. I felt rusty, cobwebs in my faculties.

In these adults accounts, there were many descriptions of checking out the course process and content, considering how it related to current interests and needs, and future hopes and goals. In contrast, the previous accounts suggested more of an emphasis on present and past, and the wish to move away from current situations. The data suggests that for people with less experience of formal education, who are seldom well represented in studies of adult returners, will differ in the patterns and expectations associated with their return.

The accounts of those whose stories reflect both patterns (away from and towards) are also discussed. The wish for stimulation and dialogue, however, is present within most accounts, regardless of prior educational experience.

These stories lend greater complexity to why people return, than the often simplistic focus on 'predominate motivation' in many studies (which often conclude that it is largely vocational)

The notion of 'multiple needs and desires' simultaneously interacting with various conditions seems to capture more accurately the situations of these adults prior to their return.

These different starting points, combined with the influence of prior learning, will be seen to be associated with adults subsequent experiences and management of experiences of disjunction or integration following the return to higher education.

Returning to formal education: How?

Adults retrospective accounts in the study four main patterns whereby the transition into higher education came about:

Doing O and A levels: this provided sufficient confidence and encouragement to go on to a higher degree or diploma

Attendance on some other significant course, which sufficiently developed confidence, and the desire for further stimulation and structured learning. Two main forms for such courses predominated:

those that are designed to ease the return to higher education, such as an access, return to learning, or 'second chance' programme

those that have been run by, for example, a voluntary or training organisation

Direct entry onto courses.

'In and out' : This pattern characterises those adults who have engaged in at least one significant course of study at higher degree level since completing their initial education, but who, at the time of this study, had a gap of three years before returning again.

Associated with each of these patterns are circumstances such as those described in the previous section, and particular and often chance kinds of encounters with information or people. These combine in the most interesting ways to give rise to a return to study.

These accounts continue to illustrate the impact of prior learning, within and outside formal education, on the expectations and patterns of these adults' lives as learners. The complexity of the conditions and circumstances surrounding their return are also most evident. They how and the why of their returns are inextricably intertwined with their past. Barriers and incentives in higher education itself are also seen to interweave with other restraining or facilitating forces in intricate ways.

Vulnerability, risk taking, fragile lives and an element of chance characterise many accounts of how and why these men and women returned to higher education. These themes are all the more visible in the accounts of

those whose previous experiences of education were characterised by disjunction. Some adults show their increased resilience and determination, partly due to their own discoveries about themselves as learners and learning outside the system. However, engagement with the formal system can all too easily re-activate memories of previous disjunction and vulnerabilities, anger or frustration long forgotten. For many, it was to be some time before they felt sufficiently centred and confident in themselves to not feel buffeted about by particular forces in higher education. For a few, particularly middle class adults, this is less the case. The feeling 'at home' in the formal education environment, and a sense of integration comes across quite strongly, despite any anxieties about succeeding. These patterns become increasingly evident in Chapter 9.

Detailed accounts illustrating the experiences of adults in relation to each of the four patterns described above are provided.

4. Anticipating

There are few class and gender related differences in the words used to describe the vulnerabilities that are associated with returning to higher education. What becomes more clear is the importance of interpreting these words within the context of the personal meanings and life histories which lie behind them.

The nature of each adults' anticipation of what returning to higher education may mean, as learners and as people, has been shaped by prior experiences of learning and being a learner in different contexts. For some, disjunction cuts deep into the cycles of their memories. For others, integration is the dominant trend in their history, and for a few, central to their idea of themselves as learners. Each learner's life provides a unique web of meaning. But there are also patterns that weave across the webs within the unfolding spiral of these adults' accounts over time.

I always feel it is difficult to separate out your own experience from knowledge. [...] That is something I'm going to have to work at really.

I am really very frightened. White with fright. Very nervous.

You risk a lot, especially if you are married. ..You are a threat in a way. Your development threatens your marriage. ..Its a very sobering thought that you might be threatening the whole of your family life

I was afraid of my ability to learn. and 'Will I fit in?' Am I too old? Too young?

I was proving myself from the beginning I could do it.

CHAPTER 9
DOMINANT THEMES AND CONCERNS IN
ADULTS' EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Summary

This material is presented in a slightly different form from Chapters 6-8, for the purposes of this feedback/consulting exercise.

Below, I give an outline of the main headings in Chapter 9, with a description of what each section comprises in the actual chapter.

I then provide an article that has just come out that focuses particularly on some of the issues arising from this chapter. Hopefully both will provide useful triggers to your own thoughts!

1. Introduction

This chapter continues to illustrate the developmental dimension to learning and being a learner that has been a theme in earlier chapters. Certain experiences, relationships, and the very fact of surviving a course combine to increase these learners' confidence and sense of resilience. What emerges most powerfully, however, is how they increasingly come to see themselves as lifelong learners, in control of their own directions and learning, wherever that may take place. This may be as much 'in spite of' their experience in higher education, as 'because of'. There is a gradual sense of gaining, and learning how to use, their own rudder. They become less vulnerable and better able to weather and manage any disjunction they encounter. They also learn more about their own needs as learners, and become more confident in their ability to make choices about how and where they learn.

2. First Encounters

This section describes how the adults in the study first experienced higher education. For some there was a strong disjunction between largely positive experiences and their first encounters. These reactions were most common amongst those who had positive experiences of particularly formal education as adults elsewhere.

The accounts of women who had worked largely inside their home and particularly those who entered directly suggest that they had few specific expectations, and their energy was concentrated on surviving in this new learning situation.

Some learning environments gave rise to a strong sense of integration from the beginning - particularly where support, dialogue and respect predominated. Although they may have felt extremely anxious, these adults talked about how it 'felt right' from the beginning. There were a few whose sense of integration seemed rooted largely in their own identity as learners, which is affirmed by their re-entry to higher education, whatever they experienced.

School experiences that had been characterised primarily by disjunction had a carry over effect, and there were those who felt very vulnerable or immediately reactive against certain features in the new learning environment.

3. Being a Student

Disjunction

This section describes peoples experiences of being a student in this environment, while also looking at the influence of their prior learning.

One theme relates to 'learning here' vs learning 'out there' and how certain boundaries that operated in higher education could be experienced as artificial, and a source of disjunction (See p. 27 of attached paper). Class and gender related patterns relating to if and the extent to which disjunction occurs are strongly suggested. For example, women and working class people tended to feel these disjunctions more than middle class adults.

Another theme relates to disillusionment, and these returning adults' reactions to the emphasis in higher education on 'playing the game rather than learning. For many, particularly those who had experienced discovery outside the system, a profound sense of these implicit meanings and assumptions being jarred comes across in their accounts.

Words like 'squished', 'squashed', 'crushed' appear repeatedly in womens accounts. In some instances, they conveyed the image of a blossoming flower, not yet sufficiently resilient to withstand their enthusiasm and keenness to grow being trampled underfoot.

Some could account for what they were experiencing in terms of their past. For example, three women recall their earlier experiences with maths during their initial education, and how these continue to impinge on their interaction with this new environment. A strongly remembered sense of disjunction is conveyed, easily re-activated, is conveyed.

There were also those who described a sense of disjunction in terms of their high expectations and experiences of teaching quality. Some became resigned, although they felt a strong sense of disappointment. Others found that their interactions and relationships with teachers generated some critical issues and struggles for them, particularly when their core values and beliefs, and very identity were being challenged in ways that were inappropriate. (This is discussed also in the section below on relationships).

In terms of managing disjunction, some fell back on earlier cynical attitudes about school they had held at secondary school. Others began to concentrate on vocational goals. Others show signs of increasing resilience, and held onto what they gained from previous learning experiences characterised largely by integration. For example, 'discovery experiences', or academic experiences when their potential and different ways of knowing had been affirmed helped these adults to maintain a sense of perspective during periods of felt disjunction. In other words, prior positive

experiences are identified as an important source of strength for coping with difficulties.

Integration

Others experienced integration between their expectations and experience of teaching, and found that their experience of higher education compensated in significant ways for their earlier experiences of disjunction at school. Integration was most often associated with a certain quality of respect, communication and support found in a particular learning environment. In particular, such adults conveyed a sense of feeling able to be themselves in that environment.

Integration brought a new sense of potential, and the experience of moving towards new directions. Experiencing integration in a learning environment does not mean that there is no challenge or confrontation. The critical difference between an overall assessment of 'integration' vs 'disjunction' seems to rest with the quality of support, and a certain trust that what is happening was related to positive growth. The latter quality is not conveyed in accounts of learning that seemed associated with disjunction.

Some spoke about how the environment in which they felt an overall sense of integration reinforced previous experiences of integration outside formal integration. For example, there were women who had been part of womens groups, and became students in an all female environment. They spoke about how the learning climates in both kinds of situations were similar, and enabling to their development and achievement.

4. Interactions

Interactions refer to relationships that are largely academic, such as in seminars, or more generally with lecturers and tutors, as well as to social interactions, such as with peers.

In this section, the impact of the climate for learning, as well as the institutional and social context of that learning experience is strongly conveyed. Climates are seen to inhibit or encourage; to generate a sense of disjunction or integration; to give rise to a powerful expressive voice or to silence. The quality of a particular relationship can play a critical role in enhancing or diminishing a learner's capacity and willingness to learn in particular situations - a theme which is further developed in Section 5.

Relationships emerge clearly as one of the most important factors in learners' accounts of feeling a sense of integration. Relationships also are significant in their capacity to compensate for other sources of disjunction on a course.

Accounts related to feeling a sense of disjunction between desired or expected interactions, and what is actually experienced, provides one of the most powerful and amply documented themes in the accounts of learning within higher education settings. It is also developed further in Section 5. It is however virtually absent in certain accounts.

Differences and power are key themes in many of the accounts of disjunction in relation to expected or desired interactions, and what actually is experienced. For example, the management of disjunction in relation to being an older student amongst younger ones is a prevalent concern. For a number of women, age and gender differences were both at issue.

Power was implicitly a theme in accounts of learning at school, but it comes across more explicitly in the descriptions of learning in higher education. Disjunctions arising from the experience of tutors' use of power in particular situations has meaning both in terms of the institutional context, and the social relations which operate therein, and the learner's prior experience within the wider social context. These disjunctions are most acutely felt by adults who are women, Black and/or working class.

There are also accounts of disjunction in relation to the social side of being in higher education. Differences, especially in terms of age are of concern proved a source of great difficulty. Many adults spoke about how they felt at odds with many of the 18-21 year olds whose preoccupations and priorities were so very different. This was regarded by a number as a loss, and a source of concern about higher education generally.

Different strategies for managing disjunction were suggested. Some internalised the difficulty, seeing themselves as 'the problem'. Others tried to deny what was happening. Others felt considerable anger, particularly when deeply felt tensions from their past encounters with teachers at school were re-activated.

As suggested above, prior learning experiences characterised largely by integration can provide a source of strength and resilience, as well as insight. In the accounts below, there is evidence of movement towards reduced dependency on others' evaluations towards a more internalised sense of integration and possibility as a learner.

As also indicated above, accounts which convey a sense of integration suggest various factors were operating: dialogue, participation, respect, an effective balance of support and challenge, and a feeling of being drawn out and encouraged to fulfill their potential.

5. On knowing and knowledge

This section examines the different kinds of knowledge that adults bring into an educational environment, and the kinds of knowledge that are seen as legitimate in that learning context. Tensions around what counts as 'legitimate' knowledge' are suggested. So too are concerns about the expression of knowledge. Women in particular express their frustration at having to fragment their interrelated knowledge gained through experience into artificallyly discrete compartments. This theme is conveyed in some detail in the attached excerpt from the paper, particularly by Sally. Another powerful theme is that of finding a voice, or feeling voiceless (and powerless).

6. Reflections on the experience of higher education

This section is in three sections. The first reflects views on the system as a whole, based on these adults' experiences as learners outside and within higher education. The second part incorporates wider reflections on what it has been like to learn over time, in different places, at different life stages. The third includes 'advice to tutors working with adults'. This is based on a role play I did with some participants in the study:

IMAGINE I HAVE JUST LEFT UNIVERSITY AND AM AN EXPERT IN MY SUBJECT AND HAVE BEEN HIRED TO TEACH ADULTS. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE ME?

7. Changes

This section documents the changes that adults associated with their experiences of learning in higher education. This section in particular illustrates how these adults considered themselves to have developed increased confidence, resilience and maturity as a learner, sometimes because of what happened, sometimes in spite of their experiences of higher education. They speak about how they feel more able to manage disjunction, as well as their deeper knowledge about themselves as learners. A common theme in the accounts is that their experiences of returning to, and surviving in a formal education context, whatever the nature of that experience, compensated for previous disjunctions. Moreover, many expressed the confidence in their own capacity to learn, and an increased lack of dependency upon the need for validation of themselves or that learning from the formal system. Moreover, many spoke about the choices they thought they would make in future. They spoke about what they would look for in any subsequent learning experiences they chose to undertake within higher education, in order to increase the odds that integration, rather than disjunction would predominate.

8. Counterpoise

THE NEXT SECTION IS ALL OF YOU, RESPONDING TO ALL OF THIS IN WHATEVER WAY YOU CHOOSE!! Poems, paragraphs, scribbled notes in margins, etc are all welcomed!! The attached paper gives some actual accounts in detail from adults in the study, which may also be of interest and use in capturing your own responses to this material. AGAIN, MANY THANKS!!

APPENDIX 11

CYCLE 8 CHECKS WITH NON-STUDY PARTICIPANTS SEMINAR MATERIAL (8111)

PURPOSES:

TO PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO THINK AFRESH ABOUT SOME SITUATIONS YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED AS ADULT LEARNERS

TO CONSIDER IF AND HOW YOUR EXPERIENCES RELATE TO SW'S RESEARCH ON INFLUENCES OF LIFELONG LEARNING ON ADULTS' EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF RETURNING TO FORMAL LEARNING CONTEXTS

TO USE A VARIETY OF TEACHING/LEARNING APPROACHES WITH INTENTION OF HEIGHTENING INVOLVEMENT, EXPLORATION, REFLECTION, RELEVANCE, PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING.

TO CONSIDER SOME WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF THESE EXPLORATIONS

Suggested structure:

Introduction to key themes and excerpts from adult learners' stories from study (30 min talk)

Exploration of these ideas in context of your own experiences as adult learners/mature students (individually, trios activity; sixes discussion.)
Posting of emergent themes/commonalities/differences/issues

(Break)

Large group reflections/explorations, building on small group work, including consideration of implications for HE and for yourselves as 'enablers' of others.

Continuities and discontinuities with other research

Close

'FEELING KNITTED TOGETHER OR FEELING PULLED APART'
EXPLORING THEMES OF DISJUNCTION AND INTEGRATION IN ADULTS'
EXPERIENCES OF RETURNING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Getting Started Activity

Purpose:

- 1) To provide an opportunity for you to reflect actively on aspects of your own experience as an adult learner, as a basis for further discussion; consideration of some key issues arising from this study; exploration of implications for widening access to higher education and for you as a learner.
- 2) To give you the opportunity to engage in some different approaches to academic teaching and learning that are designed to build actively on your experience, individually and in association with others; foster critical thinking and reflection from different perspectives; encourage active involvement and active working with academic material; foster the 'making of connections' and deep understanding, rather than 'surface learning'

Format

Please work with two others, with whom you feel sufficiently able to explore aspects of your experience as a learner. No personal details need be given outside of that trio: only wider issues, key themes, areas of commonality and difference, etc.

Three rotating roles: talker, listening/facilitator, observer

Each person has 10-15 minutes to reflect, assisted by a facilitator, and an observer/coach/timekeeper. Roles rotate after each round.

GUIDED REFLECTION (FIRST, INDIVIDUALLY, TO SELF; THEN WITH PARTNER)

Think about two contrasting situations in your experience as a learner in some kind of sustained group situation, either within or outside formal education.

- a) One into which you could enter fully as a learner, feeling that here was a situation in which you could grow, discover, take risks and engage in significant learning. Feeling engaged on all levels as a learner.
- b) One in which you felt pulled apart, at odds with yourself and that learning environment/group, in ways that were not conducive to learning. Feeling possibly detached. at risk, threatened, frustrated, confused, or angry. Unable and unwilling to enter fully into that situation.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE REFLECTION: FOR TALKER, FOR FACILITATOR/LISTENER:

- 1) Compare and contrast the key features of the two situations, as they stand out for you in retrospect.
- 2) What was happening and what was not happening in each situation to make you feel the ways you did?

- 3) What kinds of words would describe what learning and being a learner meant to you in each of those situations?
- 4) In what ways were you helped to manage what was happening (either within or outside that situation). As you look back, what did you need more of or less of from others?
- 5) How were your feelings/experiences as a learner the same and how were they different in these two situations?
- 6) What key issues arise for you out of these reflections, that seem important in terms of your current situation, and choices/actions as a learner in future? In terms of your interactions with others (in other kinds of learning situations)?

TALKER

Explore what arises for you in response to these questions, as guided by your listener/facilitator.

LISTENER/FACILITATOR

Your role is to guide your partner through these questions, in ways that help him/her to explore these dimensions of experience in some depth. Try to reflect back key words to help her/him hear and clarify what they are saying and go further. Not about giving advice or comparing what they are saying with your own experience; not about judging or evaluating. Tune into their agenda and go with the issues that seem important to them. Draw them out, show you are listening, checking out what you do not understand. You are in essence trying to enable them to learn from reflecting on a situation in depth. Try to cover all of the questions, but feel free to word them/pace them in ways that feel comfortable for you and relevant to issues arising.

OBSERVER/COACH/TIME KEEPER

- 1) Ensure that each round keeps to time (12-15 mins)
- 2) Ensure that the listener/facilitator listens and facilitates. Coach and support that process, if necessary. For example, 'May I suggest that you pick up the theme of __.' or 'It seems like you are taking over with what's important to you...' Can you go back to asking questions that pick up on what he is saying, for example....'
- 3) RECORD THE THINGS THAT SEEM TO BE AT ISSUE/ KEY POINTS/COMMON AND DIFFERENT THEMES. ARISING OUT OF THE DISCUSSION.

AT THE END OF EACH ROUND, review how it went for each of you, and how you might on the process for the next round. (Please save comments about what you spoke about til after everyone has had a turn)

AFTER ALL THREE HAVE HAD A GO:

20 minutes:

CONSIDER the observers' notes, and discuss wider issues arising.

RETURN to the large group with one question which you particularly want to explore through cross-group inner circle discussions

APPENDIX 12

CYCLE 8 CHECKS WITH
NON-STUDY PARTICIPANTS
RESPONSE FROM 'D' (8v)

(Please see Appendix 58)

APPENDIX 13

TALKING WITH STUDENTS: BECOMING MORE OPEN

Field record: SW: ANOTHER THING AGAIN, AND JUST TO TELL YOU A BIT MORE ABOUT THE RESEARCH I AM DOING: IT'S ABOUT DIALOGUE. IT'S NOT ABOUT ME MAKING ALL THESE QUALIFICATIONS (?)(SHE SAID SOMETHING WITH LAUGHTER). NOT ME AS EXPERT GOING AWAY AND INTERPRETING THIS BUT CONSULTING WITH YOU AND CHECKING OUT THE MEANINGS I AM HEARING AND SEEING IF THEY HAVE ANY RELEVANCE TO YOU. S: Sounds like the [kind of research] I am interested in! *(in reference to previous disquiets she had expressed about the university to which she had progressed, following two years at Hillcroft)*

Field record: HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE INTERVIEW? I was a bit apprehensive to begin with because I wasn't really sure what it entailed really. Whether you're being nosy again (reference to disquiets she had expressed earlier about people asking her about her experience as a working class woman) But no it was great. Nice to talk to you. DID YOU FEEL IT WAS YOU TALKING? Yeah, yeah. It was me (laughter). (III, Sheila, February, 1986)

Field record: HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE INTERVIEW? I hope its been useful for you. BUT DID YOU FEEL IT WAS YOU TALKING, IN TERMS OF LEADING OR ANYTHING. Oh. Yes. No, (laughter) fine! I hadn't given it any thought before I came so it was all quite spontaneous *(She had seen the letter of introduction)* (Victoria, May, 1985)

Field record: WELL, THERE IS A LOT TO PICK UP INDIVIDUALLY, IF YOU ALL FEEL O.K. ABOUT STAYING?) *(chorus of yeses)* ANY FEEDBACK TO ME? HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE INTERVIEW? DID YOU FEEL I WAS LEADING YOU? DID YOU FEEL YOU WERE TALKING FOR YOURSELVES? ANY THOUGHTS ON THAT? You led but you have to *(chorus of yeses)* in that sort of situation. We don't know what we want. You didn't lead too much. You gave us enough to get us started. USUALLY I AM MORE OPEN ENDED AND SPEAK LITTLE AND TODAY I FOCUSED MORE AND SPOKE MORE. But you wouldn't get at how we felt at five [years old]! Don't usually think about that! SO I WAS TRIGGERING YOU. DID YOU FEEL YOU WERE GUESSING WHAT I WANTED OR TALKING FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE? I was speaking from my own experience. But I was unsure as to whether it was of any interest to you. V: I figured if it wasn't relevant you would say. FOR ME IT IS ALL RELEVANT. I AM USING THE TRIGGER FOR A REASON BUT WHATEVER COMES OUT IS RELEVANT. IT'S A DIFFERENT KIND OF RESEARCH THAN TRYING TO PROVE OR TEST A HYPOTHESIS. BUT INSTEAD, I WANT TO GET PEOPLE TO REALISE THE COMPLEXITY OF THE AREA AND ALL THE INDIVIDUAL THEMES THAT RUN THROUGH, OFTEN RECURRING THEMES, ARE VERY RICH. SO WHY I DON'T WANT YOU TO FEEL THAT YOU ARE TRYING TO GUESS AN ANSWER BUT ALSO WHY I AM OPENING UP THINGS THAT MAY TRIGGER THINGS FOR INDIVIDUALS. *(group chorus of, 'Hmm sounds interesting.' 'Its good', etc)* SO I APPRECIATE THE FEEDBACK. SHOULD WE GET SOMETHING TO EAT? SORRY ABOUT THE COFFEE *[which we had missed because we were so absorbed!]*

APPENDIX 14

TALKING WITH STUDENTS:
TAPPING INTO MEANINGFUL AND UNEXPRESSED CONCERNS

Field record Sally: Like I am very concerned about the people who are coming behind me here [Hillcroft] and I think it should be the same everywhere. THAT'S VERY SPECIAL. HOW ABOUT THE PROCESS OF THE INTERVIEW. HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THAT. LIKE I HAVE SPOKEN MORE THIS TIME THAN LAST? Umm, not so much different. I feel a little more relaxed. It is strange to come back here [to Hillcroft where we met for our first follow up interview]. FIRST TIME. No, but it is more neutral ground than it was [then]. Like before, I thought you had come here to interview me. IT WAS YOUR PLACE (*nods*) Now it is totally different. I feel we have both come here to meet, so a totally different accent. I HADN'T THOUGHT ABOUT THAT. HOW ABOUT WHAT I DID, BECAUSE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I HAVE DONE IT THIS WAY. IN TERMS OF GIVING THE TRANSCRIPTS BACK. FIRST OPPORTUNITY I HAVE HAD SO HOW DID IT WORK? Very well, and I personally don't mind reading something and then speaking as I go. But I am quite a quick reader and some people find that upsetting and want to put the brake on because they have to read and think at the same time but I found this totally satisfactory and I liked talking first. ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT. TELL ME HOW THIS HAS FELT DIFFERENT FROM THE LAST TIME. [...] DIFFERENCES AND THE SIMILARITIES. I feel more confident and I understand more about what you are about and more on a footing with you, 'cos some nice things about university, I hadn't begun to understand what research is about and which involves, and the purpose of it, and the hours you have to put into it and I am very aware of that [...] So I have much more empathy with you now. (VII, Sally, 5/87, p. 65)

APPENDIX 15

LEARNING AT SCHOOL/LEARNING THROUGH LIVING
DISJUNCTIONSDEREK:

Field record: TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR INITIAL LEARNING. I suppose the first one that comes to mind, thinking in a chronological order, has to be my parents, and mother, and that was an ongoing thing and still is, my mother particularly [Note: Derek's father died when he was 11] TELL ME A BIT ABOUT THAT LEARNING YOU ASSOCIATE WITH YOUR PARENTS. Not formal learning, not sitting down learning, but more being given experiences and having experiences related to me that formed me, but an ongoing thing. No, insidious. (laughter) Wrong connotations. INTEGRAL? No, more than that, constantly surrounded by it, soaking it in. CONTINUAL OSMOSIS? Yes! Osmosis. Diffusion might be better. RIGHT ITS IMPORTANT THAT YOU USE YOUR OWN WORDS. AS YOU LOOK BACK AT THIS PROCESS OF LEARNING WITH AND FROM (DOES THAT DESCRIBE IT) No, from. Not necessarily contributing to the body of knowledge and experience my parents possess. (II, 6: 115/3) THINK ABOUT THE LEARNING YOU DESCRIBED OUTSIDE SCHOOL, THAT INVOLVED YOUR PARENTS, YOUR MOTHER PARTICULARLY, AND THINK ABOUT YOURSELF AS A LEARNER INSIDE SCHOOL. IN FACT LET'S TAKE THREE OF THEM. LET'S TAKE, LEARNING OUTSIDE (WRITTEN OUT), INFANTS/JUNIOR AND SECONDARY, NOW . IF WE TAKE THAT, AS YOU LOOK AT THOSE THREE HEADINGS, PRIMARY/JUNIOR; SECONDARY; HOME: IN WHAT WAY ARE THEY ON A DIMENSION, DO YOU SEE TWO THOSE BEING THE SAME AND OTHER BEING DIFFERENT? I think those two, learning outside and infants and juniors. TELL ME A BIT ABOUT..Similarities in that whatever was being imparted to me was being imparted to me especially, and was more concerned with drawing on my experience. CAN YOU SAY HOW THIS DIFFERS FROM [INDICATING SECONDARY] In secondary school, I was given things. Given information that didn't necessarily have any tie up with my life at all. But at infants and junior, you were taught about trees and things that meant something to me, but in secondary, its only about Thomas Telford and Isambard Kingdom Brunel which had no direct bearing that I could see at the time. " (II, 6: 109/12)

Victoria

Field record: "I never saw school as being part of what living was about (laughter) and that was it and it didn't relate much to the real world or to me. Not to my real world at any rate. I didn't see much at all, didn't see any point to it. DID YOU IN SECONDARY AND JUNIOR, WAS THERE THAT FEELING OF THE SPLIT BETWEEN TWO, OF LIVING AND BEING IN SCHOOL. I wonder if it was being because we were all local children at the school. Like we used to do nature kinds of things, like schools don't do, all part of learning about the world and all exciting and all. I remember asking about logorithms, what they are all about, what are they for and where do they come from. "You don't have to know any of that, just do it. " Oh, what the heck. If they don't give you any answers, why don't they, why do they expect you to do all these abstract things? (let out sigh)

APPENDIX 16

A SENSE OF INTEGRATION BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Peter:

Field record: "I came from a home where education was considered very important where there were lots of books to read and my mother was always very pleased with what I learned and she always enquired and I had to keep them happy and they put a lot of emphasis on doing it for 'your sake'. 'Please this is for your good. ' But at the same time, you felt that they would be unhappy if you didn't succeed in learning what they taught you. SO IT WAS FOR THEM AND FOR YOU? Both at the time, but there was definitely an element of pleasing other people by learning things, a strong element. [...] DURING THAT PERIOD, WAS LEARNING ASSOCIATED WITH A PLACE, WITH CERTAIN ACTIVITIES? No, a place. WITH SCHOOL? Yes, everything I did was related to the school, even if I was at home. CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT? The things we read at home we were encouraged to take into school and they would ask what we were doing and in fact we lived out in the country and we didn't see any other kids outside of the school so apart from what we learned at school, we didn't really learn anything in a group at all." (IV, 6: 074/4)

Any

Field record: "Learning was school and working hard. WHERE WERE YOU AS PART OF THAT? Clear message from parents. Until I got qualified, had to do exactly as they said until I got qualified. I had to earn a living, support myself and be independent. And yeah, it was a real important purpose.(...)Dancing I gave up quite early on when I was little because they wanted to send me onto ballet; piano I kept up but that wasn't exciting learning, enjoyed it but not as fun. Dancing was ballroom dancing. All the middle class parents sent their kids off to these things at holidays, to teach them how to chatter. I remember my mother fighting to get me into all sorts of classes that she thought were good. But nice. Really wanted to ride and never did, because it was too expensive. But I will come back to that. (laughter) (II, 6: 020/12)

APPENDIX 17

HOME-SCHOOL INTERSECTIONS AND THE
EXPERIENCE OF READING1. Susan:

Field record: (She began the interview by talking about how she finished school at 16, and did some O's and CSE's, but failed half of her O's. She said she loathed and hated school. She said that the whole experience could be summed up for her in the expression, "sponge expression".) "I didn't query, argue. It never suited me. I felt it from the moment I went." WHY? "For example, reading. I just did it. Before I went to school. When I got there, the others couldn't. It went steadily down hill from there. From age 5 plus. It was pure aggravation and I was considered disruptive. The Infants was a write-off. " (V, 6: 15)

Field record: "I always read a great deal. I had a strong sense of learning outside school. But I couldn't argue. About what I was reading. I didn't distinguish what was done in the classroom from what was done outside. I learned you had to educate yourself. And you had to fight hard to preserve that. But with independent learning, you have no people to discuss things with. This felt 'quite odd'. (V, 6: 108/5)

Jane

Field Record SO WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR EARLIEST MEMORIES OF LEARNING? Well, my mother taught me to read at 4 , before I went to school and I read the WATER BABIES when I was five and at 5 went to a private school, but my mother neglected to tell them I could read, and I didn't tell them I could read, so I sat there for the first six months, bored out of my mind, and I think that has influenced the whole of my education adversely.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU WERE FEELING? YOU SAID, 'I DIDN'T TELL THEM'. No, I was terrified. It was a very authoritarian type school. It was run by two little old ladies - they were probably 38! In a converted warehouse. So that one class was not separated from another. Huge room, no partitions, and I found the whole thing quite intimidating...There was all this noise , lots of children and I cried all day everyday for the first week and the teacher dragged me out in front of the class and humiliated me, and this made me cry even more. 'Isn't she a silly girl' and all that. So it wasn't a very happy experience. SO YOUR FIRST MEMORY WAS PAIN. Yes, and I had to stay for school dinners for the first week and I thought that school would never end and I had never been away from my mother before, and it was just hell. " (II, 6: 035, 2)

Amy

Field record: LET'S JUST START AROUND INITIAL SCHOOLING. HOW DO YOU REMEMBER THAT? ANY THOUGHTS THAT COME TO MIND ABOUT WHAT LEARNING MEANT TO YOU AT THAT TIME IN YOUR LIFE? Amy: I suppose 'cause I learned a great deal before I went to school, it was a bit disappointing. I went to a little nursery at 4, a sort of nursery, really quite formal, and then went on at five to an independent girls' day school. Junior, preparatory, fee paying subsidised students, and that was really quite disappointing at 5. GOSH, YOU SEEM TO REMEMBER THAT QUITE VIVIDLY. Yes, because I remember reading and I didn't learn to read at all. Just learned to do it and they didn't believe me, so they gave me books that were very, much too simple, and when I tried to tell them, they didn't believe me, and I thought this is just a shame. There were things more interesting that I wanted to read than Janet and John. (II, 6:030/2)

Janet

Field record:: "I just felt frustration because I could read when I went to school and they didn't believe it and they kept giving me the same book and my mother had to go and forcefully insist. "(VI, 6:069/6)

Penny

Field record: "Irish working class. She never had any opportunities so her eldest daughter would do all the things she didn't do. " (V, 6: 80/3)"She used to stand over me. Look at that word, get it right. Had a very bad effect on me. To the extent that I thought I was dyslexic. But now I think I am just so anxious, that my anxiety gets the better of me. If I am not aware of what I am doing, wonderful. But if I am, I think I can't possibly be doing this and all the rest. SO IF YOU DON'T THINK ABOUT IT. That's right. Then its o.k. WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER DID THAT AFFECT YOUR READING AT SCHOOL? I was always good at maths, but if you had a problem, you had to read it. Adding up was fine, but if you can't read it affects your whole education. So you imagine you are an idiot as a result. (V, 6: 131, 6)

Georgette

Field record:Well I started to learn from my dad. He'd had a terrible time at school himself, as a working class man also, and he was determined they wouldn't kill it for me. So he taught me to learn things for myself and until I was ten, it was dead easy and he taught me everything and then at 11 I went to the local grammar school and started to fail. " (I, 6: 88, 10)"On the outside was me learning how to live. My dad got me a job when I was 11 and a half and taught me how to manage money and reinforced me and [...] I was learning book keeping, cooking, everything for life, I was a better cook than my mother. So it was everything practical. But I always loved reading and I had lots of opportunities to read and read and read. But learned from home. I was always privileged with books and comics. (I, 6: 91/18)

APPENDIX 18

DIFFERENT TEACHERS, DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS

Jane:

Field record:Jane: My performance used to swing according to what the teacher said about my performance. So for example, I had one year of this ancient history with the headmistress [*note: This is where Jane felt able to make use of learning through reading about archaeology with her father at home, discussed in 3.2.*] and because I was really interested in it, she was very impressed by this and she encouraged me and I was top of the class, briefly. The next year, we had this history mistress who told all the scholarship people to stand up and she used to pick on me all the time and say, This is Mrs. ___'s [headmistress] blue eyed girl...and so I went from top to bottom in the course of one year, which was pre-O level and so I failed my O level and then afterwards she had the nerve to say, 'You should have passed it. Why did you fail it?' And the French mistress, and I was at the bottom of the French group, and she said, "You could be good at French if you tried, and consequently I finished at the top of that. That was one of the few O levels I passed . Got an A for it. (II, 6: 02/11)

Pamela

Field record:HOW DO YOU THINK OTHERS WOULD HAVE SEEN YOU. LETS TAKE SECONDARY TEACHERS. WHAT MIGHT BE SOME OF THE WAYS THAT THEY MAY HAVE PERCEIVED YOU AS A LEARNER AS A STUDENT IF YOU WERE TO REVERSE ROLES WITH THEM? Depends on who it was. I think, some would feel that they were getting quite a spark and enjoyment from teaching, and others, very bloody minded and stubborn and switched off. (III, 6: 07/34)

Susan

Field record: I always had a strong personality. Teachers either liked it or they didn't. If I hit it off, I did well. If not, I didn't. In my fourth and fifth year, there was this form teacher I got on well with. I was doing history. She was doing Geography so I swapped a term with him (CSE). I took the exams and came first. I then shifted to O level, but dropped it because I failed (I didnt like the teacher.) (V, 6: 25.5)

- . Field record: *She spoke about how, in the Junior School, they started trying to instill knowledge:* "Except the Head developed a personal interest in me. I was caught thieving and he said I was, 'bored but bright'. HOW DID THIS MAKE IT DIFFERENT? I felt I got some attention. I felt it wasn't just attention though because the other teachers' attitudes changed and my parents started to say, "Susan's bright. " But then we got to the 11+. There was this greater pressure to succeed at ages 10, 11. I went to an interview for [a grammar school] and I felt conned at the interview. I didnt know why I had failed. I thought I had done well. But I failed. I hadn't learnt why. No feedback. " (V, 6: 26/3)

APPENDIX 19

GIRLS AND MATHS:
RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTICULAR TEACHERS

Rhoda

Field record:TELL ME ABOUT PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE YOU REMEMBER AS FACILITATING YOUR LEARNING. Primary school, I hated every minute of it and I can't remember a one. I ASKED HER WHAT INHIBITED HER THERE? I was bad at arithmetic. I also had this one teacher who hit me. From then on, I was always bottom of the class. (I, 6: 038/11)

Diane

Field record: *She then went on to elaborate about her experiences at secondary school She explained that Maths was her worst area, although she had always enjoyed arithmetic, algebra and geometry posed new obstacles. But again, she recalls these being enhanced by an , "old fashioned teacher who was highly sarcastic. " She paused, recalling the memory in more detail and then said, suddenly, "It was a perfect example of how to squash a budding learner. I was totally blocked off. "* (I, 6: 5/10)

Jane

Field record:YOU SAID THAT YOU FELT THAT THIS [INITIAL] EXPERIENCE HAS AFFECTED THE WHOLE OF YOUR EDUCATION ADVERSELY Jane: It did. The whole...Another memory I have of school, I couldn't do arithmetic at all and this teacher slapped my legs when I couldn't do multiplication. Consequently I am frightened to death of that. I am still finding it difficult now. SOME OF THOSE MEMORIES OF THE FEARS. Yes, that's right. You would think at my age I would have come to grips with it really. (II, 6: 034/4)

APPENDIX 20

TEACHERS AS POSITIVE INFLUENCES

Penny

a)Field record: SO GOING BACK TO YOUR INITIAL SCHOOLING, COULD YOU LOCATE A TEACHER WHO STANDS OUT POSITIVELY FOR YOU? (*She spoke immediately*) Sister Bernadette. She was young and I liked her, and the art teacher at the secondary school.[...]She couldn't have been that old. You can't even tell how old adults are. She had, everyone liked her. She didn't appear to be prejudiced towards anybody. And she made learning fun. I, I don't remember what in particular, vaguely history. THAT WAS SISTER BERNADETTE. [Yes] The art teacher was very way out. My first teacher at the secondary school. I am sure these people praised me. I can't remember anything else [...] so the encouragement. Yes, that's it. " (V, 6: 81/11)

b)Field record: GOING BACK TO BEING IN THAT COLLEGE, WHAT, HOW WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING THE SAME OR DIFFERENT FROM SCHOOL? It was more specialised and you didn't have so many subjects and I was better at them. [...] HOW ABOUT IN TERMS OF HOW TEACHERS RELATED TO YOU? No, still very much the Victorian way of teaching. The girls and the teachers. Not like here [referring to Hillcroft]. Yes, I think the convent school, the nuns were better at relating to you, I think. I know a lot of bad nuns, but this Sister Bernadette and Sister Paul. They really cared. It was their whole life really. Very strict but they cared. BUT IN THIS PLACE YOU DIDN'T MEET PEOPLE WHO CARED SO MUCH? They were all right. They didn't not care. BUT IT WAS THAT SENSE OF PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT? Yes, thats it. (V, 6: 84/18)

Diane

Field record:She said that she remembers her caring and her capacity to draw out your potential. She also recalled a male teacher she had at 11+ with whom she felt totally at ease and who gave her the feeling that things were easy for her. WAS THAT THE RESULT OF HIS SKILLS OR PERSONAL QUALITIES? Without hesitation she said, "Both". She said that, "Everything he did made it interesting for me to learn. " (I, 6: 66/8)

Pamela

Field record:I ASKED HER TO DESCRIBE WHAT WAS HAPPENING WHEN THE SPARK WAS THERE? [referring to earlier comment] The personality in a way and enjoying the subject. But felt on the same wavelength and encouraged. Felt capable of understanding and a sense of achievement.

Theoretical note:*This thing about being made to 'feel capable' keeps coming up with women in this study.* (Feb, 1986: III, 6: 07/34

Victoria

Field record:"When I was fourteen, there was this new teacher. She said we were all capable of passing this exam. And if we all learnt what she told us, we would pass. And she had the bottom group. The [unclear. Bedwalls? Devils?] The new teacher, I suppose, they always get the rough end of the stick, I suppose but she did, she got everybody through. HOW DO YOU THINK SHE DID THAT? She had this [she implied 'manner'] , talking to you as though you were human. That's what we liked. She was very ordinary. She just explained things without anything seeming difficult, mystical or whatever. This, this, this and do your part. She did her part. "You'll be all right" and we did, we all got through and it was clear. V, 6: 100/8)

APPENDIX 21

BEING AT SCHOOL: OVERALL MEMORIES

Sally

Field record:About the time I came up to the 11+ I promptly had a nervous breakdown and I didn't take the 11+ at all which meant I went directly to secondary school and it was quite a long way from my home. [...] I loathed it. I found the older boys at the school absolutely terrifying and I hated the atmosphere of discipline and the cane. The girls didn't get the cane, but boys did, but one of my most awful memories was with a school friend of mine sitting on the steps crying because her brother had had the cane and I hated the whole atmosphere of violence. [...] I was so unhappy, I would cry incessantly I so loathed it but my mother made an attempt to get me moved to an all girls school. " (V, 6: 075/10)

Pamela

Field record:The sorts of feelings were tenseness, competitiveness at having to achieve, different personalities of teachers, not a lot of pleasure. Its sort of very negative. " (III, 6: 015/33)

Todd

Field record:HOW ABOUT YOUR EARLIER SCHOOL EXPERIENCE? Nothing positive. No good teachers. I was thoroughly frustrated. Partly it was my educational outlook and they had nothing to offer me. I was only interested in art or music. At primary school, you had to do one thing or the other. I was stuck. I was also a loner. [...] But most of my memories are associated with my frustrations arising from these restrictions. I was also left handed and they kept trying to make me right handed, kept slapping me about. The only pens they had were for right handed people [quills] WHAT ABOUT SECONDARY SCHOOL? That was my fault. I went to a technical school because my sister was there. This was not the right place for me. And there was nobody to give me any attention. The classes were too large, 25-30. They had to put all their attention to control the disruptive kids. Deal with the louder element. ((I, 6: 69/2)

Rita

Field record: Rita." So school was a lonely time for you? yeah. I was a misfit. Everybody would be playing hockey and there would be three of us at the edge of the field having a wonderful time. CJ who had epilepsy, and so and so who had asthma and then there was me and I didn't know what my physical handicap was. It was nothing you could point to. But that was always the way. I can't remember having more than 1-2 girlfriends and those were always the ones who were considered the ones not to be with. AND WITH TEACHERS? ANY STRONG RELATIONSHIPS IN TERMS OF COUNTERACTING SOME OF THOSE...I liked the maths teacher and she liked me because I did good maths. But we didn't talk about anything except maths. WHAT WAS IT YOU WERE RESPONDING TO,

BESIDES THE SUBJECT. I don't know. (*smiling*) [The inadequacies of the English language! it was funny., She disapproved of me half-heartedly, but I liked her and she was very straight forward and if she thought you were slacking she would tell you but if she thought you'd done well, she would tell you, so I felt quite safe with her. I trusted her." (VI, 6: 132/19)

APPENDIX 22

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS DURING TIMES OF
TRANSITIONJane:

Field record: [She had spoken previously about the need for direction and contact from teachers to help her to learn] THATS A VERY STRONG VALUE. WHEN DO YOU THINK THIS BEGAN TO DEVELOP? I think at secretarial college. It doesn't sound a very promising ground for educational enlightenment but it was very enriching for me. I think I put it down particularly to the English teacher. But not just the teacher but the whole set up. It was less formal. And the contrast! (II, 6: 041/13)

[I asked her to talk about what made it feel different] Well, I think accepting my ideas as valid, whether they agreed with them or not. You were allowed more freedom to be wrong. There wasn't necessarily one right answer and everything else was wrong. SO YOU REMEMBER THIS AT THE COLLEGE? yes, I used to have a very good English teacher who used to spend nearly all the English sessions having group discussions. Which you were never allowed to do at the Grammar school. I never had any discussions and our ideas weren't welcomed. 'Sit in one place and do as you're told. ' Maybe later on, it was different. Not quite as rigid. But lower down, you were meant to sit in your place and do as you were told and answer when asked and not before. (II, 6: 040/14)

Nancy:

Field record: I loved it, and the tutors there, it was so different. They just treated you as people and if you wanted to miss lectures, that was your problem and it was a totally different atmosphere altogether. TELL ME SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH IT WAS DIFFERENT. Well, that for one, you got treated as a peson and plus, we were in small groups. I think I'm more or less better with a smaller number, and also the things we were learning wer so new to me. It was a lot of practical work and drawing, and you know, as well as the window display and they sent you out a lot and we went to museums, and shops and everything and you just got mixed up in it all. it was good [...] and I enjoyed it. ky there. (V, 6: 39/10)

Raissa:

Field record: I was never actually at school. When I wanted to do something and as soon as I could toddle over, I would do it. All children together. 7:30 until 11:00, but I was never conscious of THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN SCHOOL AND OUTSIDE SCHOOL (shook head 'no') Coming to England was different . Then I suppose I did have school, but my main teacher until I was 9 was my mother. (II, 6: 056/4)...Learning in the Sudan, my mother made learning highly available. She didnt make you do anything. She just provided the next thing so you went on and did it and [...] my brothers and myself turned out very creative. We paint and play because it was valued, it was the next thing to do and I suppose that the change over was quite dramatic, when I was about

11. When I went to the village school with Mr. Broiwn, who I actually loved. Although I was appalled at the level of ignorance of the teachers, I just did not know adults could be so ignorant, [but] he was very kind and for the first time in myh life, I got a lot of positive feedback. My mother accepted that I would do well. But Mr. Brown would say, 'Wonderful, aren't you wonderful. " So I felt very valued, so that I quite wanted to do things that would please Mr. Brown. (II, 6: 054/11)

Field record:SO THE ARTS STAND OUT FOR YOU. And very much valued so that I can remember AI took the lead part in a play when I was in my first year at grammar school and I think I felt totally at home and that it was walking into something I knew very well about. The teacher who took drama also taught music, it must have been musical theory,[...] but I remember her encouraging me at every point to write music and then playing for me right away and saying, wonderul, and getting the choir to sing and the orchestra to play my compositions and I was 11 and it was just, there was not show off in it. It was like breathing. SO IT FELT EFFORTLESS? Absolutely effortless. (II, 6: 052/14)

Sheila: [re transition to technical college] It was very informal. It was different from school when the teacher was at the front, you at the back. A two way thing really. There was time for tutorials, and for group discussions. i really enjoyed it because it wasn't [unclear] at all. SO THE LEARNING FELT QUITE DIFFERENT? Very different. I think at school, the teachers never made time to speak to you as an individual, but when I went to college, there was then part of the tiuemetable that you had supervision with the tutor and when I was at school, I wasn't really able to express myself, to make them notice me, you know, so when I was at college, I was given time. I didn't have to, there wasn't any pressure on me to do anything. (III, 6: 42/18)

APPENDIX 23

SOCIAL DIFFERENCES AND THE EXPERIENCE
OF DISJUNCTION
IN RELATION TO LEARNING DURING THE SCHOOL YEARS

Victoria

Field record: DESCRIBE TO ME SOMEONE YOU REMEMBER AS PARTICULARLY (She completed the sentence on her own terms) Hateful? yes, the woman who stood up and said, '[Victoria spoke with great drama and a 'put on' accent) 'Victoria, you cannot spell because of your accent. " Yesss (let out a hissing noise) You speak badly; you cannot expect to be able to spell." And she used to go around the class and ask us what papers our parents read and then make little comments on them. And whose mother went to work and how do you expect any of you to get on if your mothers go out to work. (note: she slipped back into the role of that teacher unconsciously) Oh, she was hateful. If I saw her now I could kill her (nervous laughter) What a bitch she was (said with great emotion) [...] ITS VERY HARD TO FORGET SOMEONE WHO COULD DO THAT KIND OF THING Yes. I can see her now. There were any number like that. (V, 6: 99/10, 11)

Sheila

a) Field record: I lived in quite a rough area. When I changed schools to secondary school, there was more emphasis on me wanting to learn and I was put into a different group from the children I already knew so there was a lot of pressure put on me to do well. HOW DID THAT FEEL? Terrible, because none of the other children had my background [referring to previous group] and even now I have some stigma about it. I remember vividly being turned down to be a school prefect because of where I lived, and that was really hurtful - and that made me determined to do better (laughter). [...] SO WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT LEARNING AT THAT TIME, IN THAT SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT, WHAT SORT OF FEELINGS DO YOU RECALL? Sometimes hurtful. Sometimes I felt whether I should do my school work, my homework, or stay with friends who were more comfortable. ..But then it was quite difficult.

b) Field record: HOW ABOUT ON THE SOCIAL SIDE? ANY OF THOSE FEELINGS YOU HAD AT SECONDARY? Ummm, but quietly. Not as layered. LAYERED? Then you were doing psychology and sociology, so it was more public then. But there were lots of times when there was discussion and I wanted to say thing, but wasn't able to say things. WHY WAS THAT? Because I wasn't sure of myself, where I was. THINGS GOING ON INSIDE YOU? Yeah. (III, 6: 42/18)

Ethel

Field record: We weren't allowed to speak cockney at the grammar school. We had to take elocution lessons. You know, 'Happy Harry' and all that...The teachers were like aliens from another planet. They had different accents, different ways. No idea about working class behaviours and attitudes. Their lives were so removed from ours. It

was like being taught by people from another planet. [She goes on to speak about how she was always in trouble at school] (I, ': 22/13)

Nicole

Field record:The reasons i didn't like school (WAS THAT ALL THE WAY THROUGH OR ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICULAR TIMES, LIKE SECONDARY?) NO I think it was when I went to the convent school and I had passed the 11+ because I came from a typical working class background and quite understandably I fell out of place. I think that had a lot to do with it. Although I am not sure I thought that at the time. I 'm not sure why I felt so out of place. It's when I look back that I realise why. But I think it probably was that, and I thought everyone was much brighter than me and I think I didn't even try to complete. SO WHAT WOULD BE SOME OF THE FEELINGS THAT WOULD DESCRIBE THIS TIME FOR YOU? Well, I think a lot of it was that they were just generally much more confident people and they, you know, they made groups of friends and would come in with the leaders in the class and I felt very much a background figure. I think I was happy to be a background figure, because I didn't want to. I certainly wasn't very confident and I think that must have had an effect on my school work and plus the fact that I had domestic problems. YOU MEAN WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD? Well, in fact, it was my mother who had an illegitimate baby and this caused other problems...(V, 6: 19/5)

Susan

Field record: I had to go to a comprehensive outside my area. I was put into the A stream. All middle class kids. I was picked on for my accent, my grammar. The form teacher had a strange attitude. I think she was lesbian. She hated boys. The biggest punishment was to sit next to the boys. I was a tomboy and sat with them. I just had lots of fallouts like that. I was mocked for my pronunciation. i lived on a council estate. They insinuated that I was promiscuous. They consulted with my parents and put me in the A stream for Latin and in the B stream for needlework. At the end of the year, we sat exams and I got 28 out of 38. But there were 6 boys and one girl (me) I was demoted and I felt bitter. And my third year teacher said it was personal. So I said,"The hell with you. I'm not playing the game and I became one of the most disruptive kids in the school.

Cynthia

Field record:Cynthia: Well I think in those days, it was more competitive, it was all about passing exams. All the pressure to do well. From parents and teachers. I can't relate terribly well to those days. I'm a different person than I was in those days. I was very shy as a person, as a child. I lacked the self-confidence. I think it depended a lot on the teacher, as to how I reacted to a subject and I used to feel quite disadvantaged with some of the other girls in the class. And if I did well, on a study level, that coloured my relationship with friendships. On the social, I felt inadequate with them in all sorts of ways. I didnt mind the discipline of teachers but they seemed to get more out of it. (V, 6: 63/12)

APPENDIX 24

LEARNING ABOUT DIFFERENCES FROM A POSITION OF
STRENGTHPeter

Field record: *[I referred to his description of his Junior school in the village church where pleasing teachers was a central feature. He then moved to a school near the Devon dockyards]:* GIVE ME TWO WAYS IN WHICH IT WAS THE SAME AND TWO WAYS IN WHICH IT WAS DIFFERENT. Same in that it was still important to me to come top of the form and to compete where competition was encouraged which it was most of the time. It was different in that it was a question of survival not to be too much of a smart ass in the group. Before that had never been a problem, a pressure. But in the comprehensive school it is much bigger classes and you are not with the same people all the time and it was much more of an 'unnice' thing to be seen to be good so you had to relate to the teacher privately rather than in public. That was an important difference. CAN YOU ELABORATE A BIT ON HOW THAT FELT TO YOU. OBVIOUSLY, IT WAS AN IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE FOR YOU. I had to learn the hard way and the first few years I got beaten up regularly for being too clever and it wasn't until I learned to socialise rather better which I hadn't at junior school because it was such a small group that I learnt not to be too open about what I was learning about things, to keep it under a bush. [...] DID THAT AFFECT YOU AS A LEARNER? I can't split it from the social context because it did affect me and I had to do a lot more at home and I think it made me a little bit wary about speaking up in classes where the teacher would point at people and say, YOU answer and I wouldn't any more and I would get self conscious about that whereas I had never even thought about that at junior school (IV, 6: 075/6)

Raissa

a)Field record: *(following on from her previous description of learning in the Welsh grammar school as 'effortless, like breathing')* When I came to England I thought the English were gross. Totally lacking in sensitivity, unable to value what was important in life. I was horrified when I heard people say to children you are no good at that. I had never heard anyone being called out of tune or tone deaf and they came down like great big clangors. THESE VALUE JUDGEMENTS? Yes, because in my mother, with my mother as a teacher, you just went on and did things. She didn't praise you particularly but you went on and did it and in Wales it was assumed you would sing so you sang out of tune. SO LEARNING ABOUT THE ENGLISH I had a very Celtic background. I probably always, as some secret agenda, I always probably thought the English as the (gave the Gaelic word) the Saxons and they are pretty gross, pretty unattuned. (II, 6: 052/14) When I came from England I found a enormous cultural difference. I found people much more class conscious, much more aware of money. When they [her parents] offered me any school I liked because they could pay for it I distressed my parents by saying I didn't want to take a public

school place, but wanted to take an ordinary grammar school. [...](II, 6: 048/24-5)

b) Field record: ANY PARTICULAR THINGS THAT STOOD OUT FOR YOU, AROUND SUBJECTS? AROUND TEACHERS? Mostly I was pretty frightened of it, and I found it repressive, overpowering. They didn't value the individual except in terms of results. They didn't seem to know who you were unless you achieved the results, just lost in the thousands, a whole big system. I remember a few good teachers. My history teacher and I asked her a question as a follow on from a lesson. I said something like, What happened? She said, I don't know, I'll tell you. I will look it up and tell you next time. "Why should you look it up? I'll look it up and tell you." and she said to me, "That's the beginning of scholarship. "I can remember going home, thinking, 'that's the beginning of scholarship. Whatever does that mean. DID THAT TEACHER PLAY ANY OTHER ROLE WITH YOU? No, but I was very fond of her (II, 046/27)

Any

Field record: *[I was told that]* if I failed the 11+ I would go to one of the state schools and this was put as a threat to me. And that was really the pits evidently. "(II, 6: 028/4)

APPENDIX 25

LEARNERS' RESPONSES TO THEIR SITUATION
PRAGMATISMFran

Field record: But you didn't read until you finished your work (laughter, indicating common chord struck in group) And all your work. From the age of 13, I went to evening classes to get an education: cooking, sewing, bookkeeping and you got a reward and got a chiffon skirt and those were the things you did. Kept you busy for a term. And when you were a teenager and a (?unclear), three nights out, four nights in, and those had to include your evening classes. They were seen as pleasure. So if you wanted to go to the disco or whatever you had to allow for your evening class [...] didn't read a book until I was 16, except in my English class. I didn't go to a library until I was 15. I had had people read books to me. But reading a book from cover to cover, that didn't happen til I was 16 and at college. (I, 6: 92/19)

Darcy

Field record: *She described her feeling about secondary school as one of frustration. She gave as an example that she couldn't take Domestic Science because she was doing Latin. She said that she became badly behaved, told lies, started truanting. "I was an appalling student." She reflected that these were cries for help, "but no one heard. I caused trouble right, left and centre. " (I, 6, 35/3)*

APPENDIX 26

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Jane

Field record: SO IN TERMS OF PASSING THE 11+ AND GETTING ALL THESE SCHOLARSHIPS, DO YOU THINK THAT THEY WOULD HAVE SEEN YOU AS AN ACHIEVER? No that's the other thing. They had A and B streams. SORT OF LABELS? That's right. Labels all the way and each confirmed my view of myself as a helpless failure. (II, 6: 05/9) ...[so] I was the class fool. If I'm going to be in the B stream, I am going to have a good time. So I just acted the class clown, never did any work. It was a sort of a positive decision not to do any work. Because as long as I didn't do any work, I could convince myself I might be a success, if I did do any! It was a positive decision, because otherwise I might fail again." (II, 6: 03/10)

Nina

Field record: IF YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT THE TEACHERS THEN, AND SOME OF THE LABELS THEY MIGHT USE FOR YOU, DOING A ROLE REVERSAL, HOW WOULD THEY HAVE DESCRIBED YOU? Attentive, quite keen. I don't mean jumping up and down and necessarily everything just here but keen to understand. Positive, friendly, conscientious, responsible. AND THAT WAS A KIND OF GENERAL THING ACROSS THE DIFFERENT TEACHERS. Not counting the bits when you were in the loo fiddling with a new hair style. (III, 6: 013/8) SO GENERALLY SCHOOL WAS A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR YOU. BUT WERE THERE ANY TIMES YOU RECALL BEING FRUSTRATED, INHIBITED, BLOCKED AS A LEARNER? Nina: No, there were subjects that I didn't find as easy as other and still I believe I would have found it easier if I paid more attention, but in physics the physics mistress was a very nice person, very able but not to teach. There were one or two girls for whom it came easily and they'd be involved with her on an experiment and the rest of us were skylarking around elsewhere. Obviously, if I had paid attention, and that was so with one or two others. Also, algebra, I didn't really ever see the point. Now I do, that one can reason from and not for itself, but at that time, I didn't find it easy. And that wasn't frustration. Just an opting out on my part. (III, 6: 012/9)

APPENDIX 27

DISCOVERY OUT OF PAIN AND STRUGGLE

Patricia

Field record: REFLECT BACK UPON A TIME WHEN YOU FELT YOU WERE LEARNING A GREAT DEAL SINCE LEAVING INITIAL EDUCATION. CAN YOU IDENTIFY ONE AND TELL ME A BIT ABOUT IT

Patricia: She immediately cited a period in her life at 16 when she had gone on a residential youth leaders course in Horsham. It was based on A.S. Neil's principles but included day working on the farm and day study of socialist Zionism. She explained that [...]she was living with other young people and they were in charge of everything. "And the study part was not easy. Quite structured learning. But a time of great learning, growth and excitement. "I ASKED HER IF IT FELT LIKE SCHOOL, IN TERMS OF THE STRUCTURED STUDY. "No", she replied emphatically. "First I was there by choice and secondly things were taught in ways that made them closer to my own interests. Plus I had been to Israel and the course involved going there for three months. "(I, 7: 046/7)I ASKED HER WHAT MADE HER FEEL THAT SHE WAS LEARNING A LOT? She asked if she could go on to describe a second experience, which was linked to this one:

Reflection: (3/85 fieldnotes) I sensed a certain guardedness, suspicion, unwillingness to talk too much about this experience in the youth camp. Intuitively I also felt that this was a time of great pain. I also felt that this was related to a lack of trust in me - as to how I would interpret it, use this information, understand if I were not Jewish. (I, 7:61/3)

Field record: Becoming an immigrant was a experience in itself. It was a process of learning about the culture that I had entered, as well as understanding more about the one I had left behind. I learnt that growing up and living in a country there are many ways of thinking, assumptions about the world that I had taken for granted that were not to be taken for granted in my new country. I learnt to speak Hebrew and a whole new way of relating to people opened up. Hebrew is a very direct language and people tend to say what they think which of course is the exact opposite of my own British culture. " (I, 7: 11/7) This I think is one of the times in my life when I have worked and committed myself to getting what I wanted no matter how hard I had to work for it. (I, 7:66/10)

Field record: I ASKED HER WHAT OTHER THINGS WERE FACILITATING HER LEARNING AT THE TIME? "My flatmate, the counselling. I also remember a time when I was in front of the group , and I cried. And I couldn't believe it. I wasn't rejected. People accepted it, didn't get all embarrassed. This was a complete validation of me, since I was trying to deal with my feelings. As a whole person, I felt O.K. I was crying, but they accepted that that was only part of me. In other areas I was still O.K. Whether it was a 2 hour session, day workshop or week workshop [note: she did this training over 18 months] I always felt that. " (I, 7: 61/4)

Field record: WHAT INHIBITS YOUR LEARNING, YOU AS A LEARNER?

Patricia: A chronic lack of self-confidence. "Most people don't know that because I keep it well hidden. You're not allowed to express that sort of thing. (She laughed) I also felt inhibited as an immigrant in Israel. The whole process of moving from West to East. So new, and so completely different ways of doing things. You don't realise that until you do that. And the pressures are very difficult. I EXPLAINED BRIEFLY THAT I COULD IDENTIFY STRONGLY WITH THAT, SINCE I TOO HAD CHANGED COUNTRIES. Reflection (3/85): She was obviously more relaxed with me by now. Again, feeling accepted and valued as total learner? (I, 7:10/5) DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A LEARNER? I never used to. That's why it took me so long to get to college. But someone's belief in me got me here. I must answer in two ways. I get the feeling that I'm not a learner, but when I verbalise what I know, I realise I am a learner. Strange, isn't it? To give you an example, recently I went to give a talk about Israel and the Middle East. He said something I didn't like and I decided to say something. I figured I can only get smashed. I realised how much information I had and I terrified myself into silence. WHAT WAS THE IMPACT? I was asked to do a public talk. I didn't do it, but I decided to take on the questions on my own. But I realised my own feelings of fear and my own lack of confidence. (I, 7: 9/7)

Field record: After sometime it seemed to me that it was important to have someone to whom I could talk about how I felt, but it also seemed to me that some of the feelings I had were not simply that I felt bad, but rather that something around me, the way people relate to one another was actually what caused the feelings in the first place. The conclusion I came to was that it is important to acknowledge the necessity of dealing with feelings, whilst at the same time thinking about the community around me, and where possible assisting to make the actual change within the community. " (I, 7: 55/14)

Janice

"I learned I didn't want to be a housewife. Not the most wonderful thing. [But] women understand me as a person. Aware of myself as a woman not wanting to place myself in roles or men. Plus learned that I was an ambitious person. conflict between what I wanted to achieve and my home. MY HOME? WHEN WERE YOU AWARE THAT LEARNING INSIDE SCHOOL WAS DIFFERENT FROM OUTSIDE SCHOOL? In school, you have an area or topic. Particularly one topic. Other type of learning is so much more wide. Also trying to find place where you fit in as well. With education, school, education can have a blinkered look. Learning to pass exams. Push out what you took in. Other much wider. Plus learning things which have a wider impact on you as a person. (I, 7: p.3/6)

Susan

Field record: I always read a great deal. I had a strong sense of learning outside school. But I couldn't argue. About what I was reading. I didn't distinguish what was done in the classrooms from what was done outside. I learned you had to educate yourself. And you had to fight hard to preserve that. But with independent learning, you

have no people to discuss things with. This felt 'quite odd'. It was just all me reading and thinking and writing occasionally. I had spells of writing. I read lots of history and all sorts of things. HOW DID YOU CHOOSE? I would come across things, and then shoot off down to the library. I would go through some stages. I tended to read ten to 12 books a week. From the library, and I bought them. (V, 7: 43/6)

Field record: But at 21, I went into a mental hospital. When I was living at home [...] I had a bedroom with books. Strange in that kind of background. (laughter) Supposed to be. But it was a problem. I remember reading Solshenitzin. I had a row with my dad. He said I was being, 'pretentious'. (Barbara Cartland was o.k.!) When I went to work, I read there and back (working as an administrator). I had spells of going out, but I changed jobs frequently. I always started off as a learner, but once it became routine, I became bored. I had nobody to talk to. So at 21 I cut my wrists. My mother said, 'This is what reading all those books does to you.' But for the first time, I found people I could talk to. Within two to three weeks, I was reading Bertrand Russell. I could talk to my psychiatrist. Three of us [on the ward] started talking. We wanted to get a flat. Other people had come to think we were all nutters. No one talked outside the hospital. (V, 7: 8/7)

Field record: He watched t.v. but I kept on reading. We also travelled. Went to New Zealand and then to Brunei. I couldn't work there and all the ex-patriot women were in the same position. Mostly middle-class women who had done degrees sitting around doing nothing. It was great! (she laughed) I learned that I am not wierdo. We talked like mad and I discovered literature. Proust. We just talked like mad. At the start I felt slightly disadvantaged. They have degrees, but this came from me, not them. When they listened, they were rapt. There really was respect. Again, I realised that the pieces of paper were a load of crap. I believed that then and I still do now.

I was there 18 months and then came the end of the contract. It was horrendous because now things would be worse. [they came back to England] Now I knew I wasn't mad. We wanted children and he couldn't have them. I was very unhappy, unsure of myself. I developed agoraphobia and wouldn't leave the house. No one understood. I saw a psychologist and he said that the whole problem was that I thought I was a man! But I was trying to fight it, and then, two weeks later, my husband was killed in a crash! (V, 7: 48/8)

APPENDIX 28

ADULTS LEARNING OUTSIDE EDUCATION:
DISCOVERY OUT OF FORTUITOUS CIRCUMSTANCESVictoria:

Field record: HOW ABOUT WHEN YOU WENT INTO WORK. DID YOU SEE THAT AS LEARNING? No, just work. That's it. Had to get a job. VERY PRACTICAL Oh yes, absolutely. [...] AS YOU LOOK BACK NOW, ANYTHING YOU REALISE NOW WAS 'LEARNING' [for you]? Not in the teenage years. Not until I got married. I got married when I was 20 and we bought our own house, and to be honest, that was just my little world, and I didn't want to escape from it. That was it. I just looked after it. No one can interfere with me here, and tell me what to do. This is my bit. I wasn't out to conquer the world. I think I just withdrew into my own shell. 'THIS IS MY PATCH. I'VE CONQUERED MY PATCH' Yeah! (laughter) And no one can tell me if I want to paint the walls purple. I can and which I did. YOU PAINTED THE WALLS PURPLE? Yeah (laughter) Ooooh, that's my bit! No one is going to interfere with me and I just went to work to help pay the mortgage. ((V, 7: 102/14)

Field Record: SO WHEN YOU LOOK BACK, YOU REALISE YOU STARTED TO LEARN IN OTHER WAYS? When I started the family and had the first child, and had time on my own, that's when. I suddenly realised I had this child and I couldn't hide in my shell any longer and I couldn't live through her and I just thought, 'Idiot!'. HOW ABOUT LEARNING AROUND BEING A PARENT? Oh yeah. I went into all that said casually, and she continued in same breath) I'm a great gardener and cook and I found out about those things. SO YOU READ IN TEING AND GARDENING? Oh yeah. HOW ABOUT DISCUSSION WITH OTHER PEOPLE? No, I withdrew completely. Couldn't relate to anybody. To my family, to anybody. (V, 7: 103/16)

Field Record: (continuing from the above account) I tell you what started it off. After I had [her child], My husband worked in the car factories as a worker and was going to night school. A levels or something. I can't remember, and there was this miners' strike. Remember the big? THE ONE BEFORE I CAME HERE PROBABLY, IN THE 70's And I got involved and I thought, Hey mate, there's more to life than...and I woke up, yeah, I really did. (said with real excitement_) I woke up! And I went along to meetings and that , with them, on marches, all sorts of things and got involved in this Trade Union stuff and started listening to what was going on and woke up, but what really did it in the end was , in that October [her husband] got a place at ____ University and he was completely bewildered by it all. He had been encouraged by a teacher to do this and we were two lost souls. Had never even met a university student, much less been one and we...That was a big change in my life, to actually experience. All I did was produce babies and that's where I got my awe of 18 year olds! Oh oh! I will never cope with these (laughter) (V, 7: 103/16)

Field Record: Yeah, we had a lot [of discussion] Yes, I read his course, most likely. Not the criticism but all the books, the novels,

all the history books that arrived on the shelves and FELT ABLE TO DISCUSS THEM WITH HIM? Yeah. and felt excitement, stimulation. A whole new world to me. DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOU AT THIS TIME TO COMPARE THIS LEARNING WITH LEARNING IN SCHOOL? No, I just thought it was better. I forget school, it was a bad experience. I didn't like it. ((V, 7:108/21)

Field Record:SO GOING BACK TO THE MINERS' STRIKE. DID THAT FEEL LIKE LEARNING FOR YOU? Yeah, yeah that was it as far as I (was concerned?) That's me, that's the real world! Somebody was in control of my life and I thought, come on, that's me you're talking about. SO TELL ME ABOUT THAT AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE. WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE TO YOU? Oh, excitement. WHATEVER WORDS COME INTO YOUR MIND. Stimulating. I felt as though I could actually be in charge of my life. Yeah, yeah, having some say in my own life. It actually woke me up. WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF THAT? DISCUSSION? WHAT WAS BEING SAID? HOW IT WAS ...yeah , it was, I think, actually being involved in grass roots level in terms of going on the marches and being pushed around by the police and really feeling, Hey, this is me! I am only trying to say something! And then you start to listen to the news and you start to read the newspapers and I really started to wake up and I think I'd been asleep for about 20 years. AMAZING FEELING? Yeah.

Field Record:Yeah , I never saw school as being part of what living was about (laughter) if you know what I mean. It was that place where I did these lessons and that was it and it didn't relate much to the real world, to me. not to my real world at any rate. (V, 6: 97/13)

Field Record:Oh yeah, they are horrors TELL ME WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU AS A LEARNER WHEN THEY ARE DOMINATING. Oh I would just go passive. And I would be emotional. I would be angry and then get accused of being irrational and a stupid woman and . (V, 7: 105/22)(...)HOW LONG WERE YOU IN THE PEACE MOVEMENT. TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOUR LEARNING AROUND THAT? Oh , we had a women's group. We started our own women's peace movement. TELL ME ABOUT LEARNING IN THAT GROUP COMPARED TO LEARNING IN THE TRADE UNION. IN THE WOMENS' GROUP, HOW WAS IT THE SAME AND HOW WAS IT DIFFERENT? Ah,yeah. Well, I think we all gave each other time to talk. Right, we did. We weren't always sympathetic and in agreement, I wouldn't say that. We had some hairy arguments. But at least you didnt feel threatened in any way. And what lay at the bottom , we were all women. We all had the same feelings. A mutual feeling that we all had similar problems and similar feelings but how you overcome them can be very frightening and I've still got friends who can't raise themselves out of their hole, and what they really feel because it is frightening. SO IT WAS DIFFERENT IN TERMS OF SPACE TO TALK. Oh yeah. ANY OTHER WAYS IN WHICH IT FELT DIFFERENT TO YOU AS A LEARNER, THE PROCESS OF LEARNING I didn't feel alone. It was nice having that, to share things, that you felt, that other people felt, and 'Gosh, I'm not mad, I'm not stupid. I am not alone. We are together on this. ' I think it was very exciting and stimulating. ARE THERE ANY OTHER WAYS IN WHICH IT WAS THE SAME AS IN THE TRADE UNION OR THE LABOUR PARTY? No, because most of the women weren't interested in politics and that was what caused most of the major arguments and most of them weren't and we were saying you can't not, and nothing will change unless you

are involved or realise that, that's what life is, how we organise life affects us all and gives us all our values and feelings. HOW ABOUT YOU AS A LEARNER AND THAT PROCESS OF LEARNING, No it felt quite different. Yes different. (V, 7: 106/23-24)

Darcy

Field Record: WHAT HAPPENED AFTER SCHOOL? I had an affair with a married man. I worked at a chemist's. Then I became a clerk at (large chemical firm) I worked my way up, learned typing, shorthand. Went to the technological college where I played truant. I felt strange. I felt this isn't right for me. I don't belong here. I'm different. Then I became junior secretary to someone. Bluffed my way into it. Then I became pregnant. How OLD WERE YOU? 17. I left my job, and lived with him for several years. it was hopeless. I left him at 20 but before that I realised I had to earn money. I went to the Adult Education Centre to do evening classes in shorthand and typing. DID THE COLLEGE FEEL THE SAME AS SCHOOL OR DIFFERENT? It felt different because I wanted to do it. It was also a means to earn money and support myself. But I was blissfully ignorant. It was all very utilitarian. I certainly was not enamoured with doing it. When I was younger, I was reacting against that system. But now it was a source of status, a route to a career. Authority issues weren't as important. But I was not a 'whole self' yet. I hadn't yet discovered alternative meanings of learning.

Fieldnote, 5/85: I was aware here of [Diane's] comment [Sharon's friend and colleague on her Cityside degree course] that she and Darcy spent hours discussing teaching and learning. Obviously they had also discussed my research, for her to say this at this point!

She went on to say that she started to think about learning when she bluffed her way into a job."Then I began learning because it was obviously me. My skills, My potential. For example, when you are a secretary, you act cute if you don't know anything. "[...She proceeded to give an example from her initial education to illustrate her perception of her self as someone who was , "aware of the essentials somehow. The underlying issues] ((I, 7: 20/6-8)

WHAT JOB ARE YOU REFERRING TO? [names firm] I was sales office manager. Well, really more like an assistant. Progressed to sales manager very quickly. EARLIER YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT WHAT YOU STARTED TO LEARN AT THIS POINT. I was an excellent secretary but I often had this 'bursting' feeling inside me. This guy in Research and Development befriended me. And gave me books to read. His name was [_] I remember discovering George Orwell. HOMAGE TO CATALONIA. I went crazy! I wanted more! HOW DID THIS RELATIONSHIP COME ABOUT? I was attractive and he was attracted. A number of men were. I also experienced fondness from a number also. So it was part of that. He was also quite protective and I talked a lot. I was going through a lot at that time with my son and husband. WOULD YOU READ AND DISCUSS THE BOOKS? No, I was too busy consuming. I just wanted to be a sponge! DID YOU KEEP GOING TO HIM FOR BOOKS? By this time I had learned a lot in terms of personal development. I went through six months promiscuity after Adam's father left. I felt that this can't go on. Not when I am 30 or 40. I therefore started looking for a stable

relationship for my son. I met my husband ____ [her mother's hairdresser]. So although the books were there for me, I put them aside and shelved them, and then shifted. I put them aside and shelved them and then shifted. They were tucked away and they were still there. But I became who he wanted me to be. (I, 7: 19/9)

Diane

Field Record: CAN YOU REFLECT BACK TO A TIME IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU REMEMBER LEARNING A LOT. SPEND A FEW MINUTES AND THEN WE'LL EXPLORE IT. Can't really think. I learned a lot from so many people. But I do remember a time when I was into learning more about women. A friend had just recommended some books to me, such as by Adrienne Rich. This triggered me. ADRIENNE RICH. YOU REALISED YOU WANTED TO LEARN MORE. Yes, I don't know how it crystallised. But I have this terrific enthusiasm to learn. Sometimes I read and say that was awful' but I really enjoy learning. That's why it hurts so much when it gets put down. There are so many ways to learn. (She laughed and put up her hand as if to stop me) Don't ask me to say them all. I just know. For example, how other people influence you. They say something. You see a book, pick it up. and that triggers another thing.

CAN YOU TALK A BIT MORE ABOUT THAT TIME? It will sound silly but I fell downstairs. There were umpteen things happening at the same time. There I was lying at the bottom and my usual thing would be to cry. I said to myself, No, You are all right! Just then a friend rang up. She said, I got this terrific book from the library. THE WISE VIRGIN. She told me a bit and said it was interesting in it (we'd been having this conversation before). It was infectious. The same day, I did everything in the house, went to the library and got it out and read it all in one day. And that's what got me started. And then all sorts of things seemed to be triggered. [She refers to a range of personal growth and development courses she became involved in] About five of us. Five women. And it was interesting how we all came to be thinking, 'something's lacking'. So my friend and I started a self help group (She brightened again.) You see, that's another way to learn. (I, 7: 75/D²14) [refers to her experience at Cityside, which will be picked up again in chapter 9] TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE SELF HELP GROUP It worked in parallel to all sorts of conversations and reading and training. [She had begun a three year counselling training course] But it became a meeting place for people who were opening up, who were saying, 'There is more to life than this' As each new person came in, they were so pleased to be in a place where you were sharing on the same or not the same level. We were like teachers really. WE were facilitating them. Meant to be more peer sharing. (I, 7: 44/D²16)

Laurence

Field Record: I think it only was marginally to do with my studying. I was an outpatient for two years at a psychiatric hospital and I decided to tackle education wise my basic problem which I later learned was dyslexia. So I went to an Adult Education Centre for illiterates, but they told me not to bother to come back. I ASKED WHY, WITH SURPRISE. Because I said I wanted to do an O level in English and

Politics. And I also used to walk out of classes, since I was still suffering from depression. (I, 7: 62/2)

Field Record: I REFERRED BACK TO HIS EARLIER COMMENT ABOUT HIS INTEREST IN LOCAL HISTORY. HOW HAD HE SET ABOUT THAT LEARNING INTEREST BEFORE? He explained that he had had a history interest for a long time. About ten years ago, he was living in a pub with a peculiar name, 'The Marshall Keate'. "I used to get into all sorts of arguments with the locals about the origin of the name and all. So I went to the library to look it up. I had no academic background. I didn't know how to use a library. I just started to look around. I discovered other books and they in turn had references to other names and more references. So this in turn allowed all sorts of interests to come in. I speculated: Keate. Was it French? So then I got into the French Revolution and Napoleon. Then I thought about the derivation of 'Marshall'. Learned that that meant a 'royal billeting officer. ' It was also located in ___ so I started reading about the area, thinking something would emerge about its origin. I used everything: local peoples' knowledge, general conversation in the pub (seminars really!) and television - anything that was on that I thought might give us a clue. And newspapers..That's the whole thing about higher education, isn't it? It takes me back to what is knowledge and education. (reference to earlier group interview) I gained a great deal from reading. I thought I was ignorant but I gained knowledge. If I had known how to search for it, I would never have got into local history. That's something to think about, isn't it? Quite profound that! (He then became quite excited) If I knew then, what I know now, I would not know now what I learned then. I must remain aware of this, that knowledge is restricted in all sorts of ways. If you compare it to the child - who roams all over the place. The more we pour into that child, the more we might be restricting his intellect and their natural ability to learn. Like in secondary school, I never learned a thing. And my early education was patchy. (I, 7: 29/7)

Field Record: Reflection: I found it interesting his referring to the library and the assumption almost that you needed an academic background. Interesting. Theoretical note: I wonder if that is a recurring theme amongst those who felt alienated from formal education. Anything smacking of the academic seeming distant, requiring special skills, etc? (2/85) (See also Weil, 1986)

APPENDIX 29

LEARNING OUTSIDE EDUCATION
AS ANOTHER DIMENSION TO
LIFELONG LEARNINGPeter

Field record:[re Sixth form] But we started to be treated more like adults in the sixth form, because we were given lots of administrative and legislative responsibility. LEGISLATIVE? Oh yes, hell, you made up the rules as you went along. RIGHT (laughter) And the whole school is divided up by stupid little divisions like the clothes you are allowed to wear at certain times and which grass banks you can walk across and whether you can sit in the art room: a myriad of childish privileges which I suppose reflects imperial courts across Europe in the last century. These little divisions that are stupid outside but meant a lot inside because you had to live with them and I was given the power to punish people which I did sometimes and you had to start questioning moral actions. Well I did. it seemed to me a lot of my colleagues didn't. They just enjoyed it. And I started to realise I really was different from them. AS YOU LOOK BACK AT THAT TIME, IF SOMEONE HAD ASKED YOU WHETHER QUESTIONING MORAL ACTIONS WAS LEARNING, WOULD YOU HAVE SEEN IT AS LEARNING? It certainly was the most important time of my life at the time. What we were learning in classrooms was A level course work and for the first time the classroom became detached for me from what was going on outside, because we were being treated roughly as adults by the teachers and encouraged to do this for our own sake and for our careers which was a new emphasis and the actual amount of the time we spent in classrooms was drastically reduced and we only had to go to the classes that were in our subjects and that gave us an hour of free time everyday. So more like the university system and if you needed special help you went and got it . So I think I began to see studying as something as on its own, as away from the rest of what others were doing so there was this change, but I did feel, started to be consciously aware of my environment and perhaps I wouldn't have called it learning then, but I did see it as important and to do properly and it was learning in a way. Now I look at it as an experience. But then it was something I was just doing. Had to do, and they put me in charge of a dormitory full of juniors because I was showing more non aggressive characteristics . The teachers weren't complete idiots. They, some of my colleagues, were complete psychopaths and some of the other nice guys too, but it wasn't something that was made a great deal of emphasis of, being decent, nice, kind and not part of the structure. Just happened that some came from happy homes and managed it. But I felt the power I had over these poor kids. I felt it was wrong and I shouldn't have. I couldn't do anything about it without leaving the school and I would come in for a lot of flack. (IV, 6:082/23)

Field record:I think I became aware of what the school was for. (...) The school was there in principle based on violence and the pressure to conform and I realised before I left that the education we were

getting was nothing to do with what we were learning in the classroom. That was just an incidental qualification we were picking up there. And they were making, in a business sense, they were making accountants and successful young men who were going out and live in the stock broker belt and conform to an expectation which is mostly drawn out of parents' expectations and this school does the job but if the parents had thought that education in a classroom sense was all that mattered they would have sent them to a comprehensive school. This dawned on me in the sixth form. That what we were learning was this bullying and this beating up and bashing around and you will do this and you will do that and obedience and respect for authority and it did infiltrate our actual academic subjects also. (IV, 6:083/26)

Raissa:

Field record: "But it was because she told me all about the Romans and was thrilled with the subject and found it so wonderful. When I brought up potted versions of texts she would say, "Oh let's have this in the real thing. It was so wonderful. (...) I found it enormously easy to learn and I remember reading the Aeniad with pleasure. " (II, 6: Int 1, p. 31-2).

Field record "the good parts were that I felt as if what mattered was going to matter inside me. It didn't have to be big outward signs and I was not going to get a certificate. I would feel I had done well. Nobody would have forced me to it. The feeling inside me would have been the only thing that counted. " (II, 7: Int 2, p. 47)

Field record: "It [the learning] was coming from deep inside me. There was a formalisation, in that I read other people and thought about other people, but the, well, I don't know if it was learning really. I felt that all that mattered was that I had taken the task on and I was going to get to grips with the task and therefore I had to define the task and I felt as if I was writing my own course, and Dr. O very much agreed with that way of doing things. " (II, 7: Int 2: 54-5)

APPENDIX 30

LEARNING OUTSIDE AS 'DEAD END'
ENTAILING LOSS OF CONFIDENCE AND IDENTITYConnie

Field Record: I married at 19 and had children within 6 months. I was a wife and mother for 10 years and I felt totally frustrated. I had tried lots of things, but none had worked. I had all sorts of uncompleted wool things. Sitting in a great pile. I had done some macrame, painting, crochet. I flew in with enthusiasm and then that was it. HOW DID YOU LEARN? I read books to learn how to do it, so I was always self-taught. Oh, I did one art class but this wasn't satisfying. DID YOU LEARN FROM OTHER PEOPLE? I didn't use other people at all. But when the youngest was three I bought this book on IQ for me. I had two adult older children. My children talked only with my husband about serious things and I felt I had nothing of worth. I felt, 'I'm a cabbage'. So I got this IQ book, and did this secret testing to see if I am worth anything. (I, 7:048/3)

Gaynor

Field Record: DID SOMEONE AT WORK GIVE YOU THAT ENCOURAGEMENT? Not really, just being aware that I was capable of doing it and comparing with others, and making judgements about what I was doing and what they were doing and I developed some idea of my self worth. And then of course I left and brought up a family and have never gone back to work. (VI, 8:74/16) HOW ABOUT READING? AND YOU MENTIONED GARDENING. yeah, I have always read. But my husband didn't like that. REALLY? WHY WAS THAT? He hated me reading because he is not a reader and he would always say, you always have your head stuck in a book. SO WAS THERE ANYONE WITH WHOM YOU COULD DISCUSS WHAT YOU WERE READING? No. SO THAT ALL BEGAN WHEN YOU CAME HERE? Yes. I suppose I had one friend, that I suppose I have been friendly with, and she 's been very encouraging. QUITE A LONG FRIENDSHIP About 15 years. Yes, it's sort of, she was a next door neighbour actually, she's a very clever person who is doing the Open University course which at that time to me was sort of really clever (laughter) Yeah, I was really impressed by this. (VI, 8:75)

Penny

WHAT WAS IT LIKE, DOING THE COOKERY COURSE? All right. A lot of skills before I arrived WAS THAT A SURPRISE? Not really. YOU KNEW THEM? No, I belonged to the WI, once I have learned to do something properly I am o.k. It's when I learn it badly and have to undo it that I get into problems. WHAT WERE SOME OF THE FEELINGS ABOUT LEARNING ON THE COOKERY COURSE? It repeated the things that I am bad at, like washing up and making things look pretty. But the food tasted lovely. I was very cut off in __ and it was an opportunity to be for an evening with people, one evening a week, and it was done in the winter and my children were away because they now go to public school. (V, 7:84/27)

Georgette

I didn't think I had any sort of capabilities. I just read for pleasure. I didn't read in any kind of constructive way. I have never been taught like Fran to go out and aim at something and to get it. The idea was to be an interesting person. Books and talking to people. I'm a practical person as well, and doing things, and the arts centre was an ideal place. Because I went to join a guy who set up an Art Centre and it failed miserably and he was told if he got an administrator of some sort, this would help. And get financial support and I happened to be in the right place in the right time and so it took off. So I have ideas, and could learn about art and see my ideas in practice across the whole range from fundraising to developing visual arts programmes, theatre programmes, dealing with people when they came. Everything I could think of. We eventually had a four story building with a bar, restaurant It was good. The two of us had put it together. SO DID YOU FEEL EVERYTHING WAS COMING TOGETHER FOR YOU AS A LEARNER? I don't think so. AS YOU LOOK BACK AT IT NOW? It was somewhere I was needed and where my ideas could be, yeah, and then being in a medical situation provided the same sort of opportunity. Dealing with a sick child. And there is a lot to do. And I took time out to listen and learn and I would do reading until someone sneered at me for being involved like that. But you are learning on the job. But I stopped doing it on the job. I stopped at my emotional boundaries as well. I didn't find out too much about my child's complaints because it would have been too much for me. (I,7: 049/22)

Vera

Field record: If things haven't gone quite right, I mean you make the best of certain situations. For example, I tried to make the best out of working in a library. It seems I didn't know enough then about how to rock the boat. How to change it. (...) Like Adrienne, one accepted things so much and then you realise you don't have to accept. You can actually learn, and the whole business, I enjoyed very much learning, around the children. I found that quite a challenge. I never felt like a cabbage at home with my three kids. I felt that every day was an exciting different sort of day. Each day they did something different. Either to annoy you or to please you. And my youngest one was a tiresome little girl, and physically you had to be on the go all the time. I found it frustrating in that I had the company of friends all the time, but I never felt I was vegetating. I always took an interest in current affairs. I would listen to the news. I always liked to read. I used to listen to current affairs and biographies or get the Economist and I kept, I had a friend who was mad about patchwork and I learned about that and I got interested in cooking and I took an interest in what I was doing around the house and if something had to be done I had to learn how to do it. And when you are abroad and you needed Christmas decorations and couldn't buy them I made them all. And you couldn't get mincemeat for mince pie, and I made it, and finding all the local fruits and I enjoyed that sort of challenge. So I think I began to think your destiny is in your hands."

Field Record: Vera: "...when I got married I just assumed I would do what my husband wanted to do. It never occurred to me to question the fact that he was going abroad and that I would have to start working, not living anywhere near my family, my friends, his family. It never occurred to me to question it. I enjoyed my children and making my way and giving parties for 30 people. All these things, I saw it as an adventure. But then I began to think, do I want to spend the rest of my life doing this. I think I decided I couldn't depend on [my husband] to present me with a world that I could live in. His world was always going to change and I had to do something for my own satisfaction. It was no good waiting. I had to do it for myself. And somehow together we had to get to grips with my doing that. I had tried to conform to him, to his ways, and it was time for him to try to understand how I felt. I still feel that. I have worked 20 years to help him do what he wants to do, but he has to let me do what I want to do. And I think you're learning through all that, and you're agonising." (VI, 7:051/50)

Nicole

Field record: [ON LEAVING SCHOOL] DID YOU TAKE ANY EXAMS IN THE END? 5-6 and passed two and um, it was just a matter, because of the domestic situation anyway, I just had to go out and get a job. There was no discussion about me doing any sort of further education. So I went DO YOU THINK YOU WANTED TO? No I don't think so. It wouldn't have occurred to me. Just to get a job. I would have thought, this is great. And then my feelings about my work stayed much the same. WHEN YOU GOT YOUR FIRST JOB. DO YOU REMEMBER THINKING YOU WERE LEARNING

THEN? DO YOU REMEMBER THE FELINGS YOU HAD? No, because my economic situation meant I had to return to work very quickly after my daughter was born and I had to earn money. SO YOU DIDN'T SEE LEARNING AS ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR JOB? No, I didn't think so then. I would say that I probably have to explain the situation.1 Separated from my husband when my daughter was 2. And then got involved in another relationship and I think it was only then, that I really had the time to really enjoy being a mother without worrying that I have to go to work in order to be with her and then I certainly enjoyed being a mother. I was thinking the other day that it probably all happened too quickly. and I was very young, immature, and I suppose it was looked on by both families as a mistake anyway to get pregnant so quickly so it was just a lot of coping, rather than enjoying. V, 7:73/11)

APPENDIX 31

LEARNING OUTSIDE AS SECOND BEST

Jane

Field record"I am not sure what you mean. You mean in the broad sense of learning about relationships? WOULD YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED YOURSELF AS A LEARNER WHEN YOU WERE BEING, FOR EXAMPLE, A PARENT? Oh yes, I am quite aware of learning all the time and particularly in relationships and with my children. They force it on you. You can't one set of values, not values, that's wrong. You cant find one way of dealing with any situation because it changes, not necessarily from day to day but from week to week and they change too and you become aware that they are no longer as available as they were or they are older and they know more and I am constantly aware of this change in my attitude and theirs and consequently I am learning more about relationships. DO YOU SEE AS SEPARATE FROM YOUR LEARNING HERE? I have never thought about it. But really, a part of the same thing, personal development. And since I've been coming here this last week or two, I have found more pressuregs on my time and I find I am doing an awful lot more, and I feel really vitalised. Something which is enriching really, it sounds so pretentious, but it re-energises you. REFUELING SOMETHING FOR YOU? yes, I actually look forward to coming. I am aware of learning. I think my family was curious in a way. You ought to be learning something and if you're not, you're wasting your time. " (II, 7: 047/29-30)

APPENDIX 32

FURTHER EDUCATION AS THE ROUTE BACK

Laurence

Field record: He explained that he used to be a mechanic. he was also a local councillor. About 5, 6 years ago, his firm made him redundant and he was quite pleased. "I thought, 'What to do now? Why not education. This 'thing' I had never had before. I figured I needed O levels to get in, so I started studying O levels. But after four months I suffered a breakdown. I think it was only marginally to do with my studying. I was an outpatient for two years at a psychiatric hospital. The upshot of it all was that I decided to tackle education-wise my basic problem which I later learned was dyslexia. So I went to an Adult Education Centre for Illiterates. But they told me not to bother to come back. (I ASKED WHY, WITH SURPRISE) Because I said I wanted to do an O level in English and Politics. And I still used to walk out of classes, since I was still suffering from depression. But it became a fixation with me. I wanted to go to university. As a local councillor, I got to know some of the lecturers at the polytechnic and I learned about [a particular course]. But one of them encouraged me to look at other courses, and I discovered this one. Which was more what I'm interested in, and also [...] which is an interest of mine. It was also local so that took care a lot of practicalities. But I'm getting ahead of myself. My ideal back then was to take a couple of O levels which at that time could get me into university. Maths and English. I also did an A level in Politics. By the end of my A level, I more or less had education out of my system. But I was still faced with what should I do. Was still attending as an outpatient at hospital and I still felt unstable. So I decided to have a go. Also, being a mature student, [referring to doing the A and O levels] there were links with the university and I still had this fixation." (I, 8:38/2-4)

Connie

Field record: At the time I had a friend at the further education college and I decided I wasn't too stupid. But it took me six months to get up the courage. I signed up and after three days I started. I felt like a man going to the scaffold. It was the agony of making the decision. I had to be pushed to go into the classroom. it was a course for mature students. I planned to do O levels: English, English literature, General Studies, Sociology. We all sat taking notes. I didn't know what to take down, what not to. I just copied everything they said. I just wanted to feel a part of the group. " (I, 8: 031/4)

Field record: It was a good course as a learning experience. It was geared to mature students and over half were over 30. We were guided through. I also realise my lack of confidence and my inability to know what to take down. The course was best for my self confidence. More so than for learning and lots of mature students developed confidence to see the tutors as human beings and to debate about what they are

teaching and to express their beliefs. You felt you had something to contribute. (I, 8: 031/4) TELL ME ABOUT YOUR LEARNING AT SCHOOL AND LEARNING OUTSIDE SCHOOL. DID YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A LEARNER OUTSIDE SCHOOL? No, I felt like a cabbage. *(Note: she interpreted this as after school, rather than during the period of her initial education)* It was not until an interest was taken in me and an interest in our own experience, beliefs, values and opinions that I began to realise that I had been learning. I had always been conscious of what was going on in the world, but I was not aware of this until then. I was there three years and got all the O levels. I did much better than I expected. 'Funny, I still had that cabbage feeling. I was encouraged to go on. I did A's in English and Sociology. I liked sociology, the two were too much stress. Too much challenge. I got tense and I still had these self doubts. I dropped English. (I, 8: 032/7)

Field record:With history, I was only concerned with getting it and therefore reducing the odds. Get a pass. Ignore the rest. Reduce the possibility of damage. Each time I got a letter saying I had passed, it was nothing but elation. But it would only last five minutes. Bit like a ladder. Constantly saying , Can I do better? SO THE ONUS FOR JUDGEMENT WAS OUTSIDE YOU? yes, that never changed. Even after A levels. Now I was 36. I reached a stop. I had done all this learning. I had enjoyed it. But I thought I can't go back to nothing. I consulted several tutors and they suggested I do a degree. I had never even considered it. Still decided on external values, not inside. But I decided to apply here because it was the nearest. They accepted me at the interview. It was a marvellous feeling, all the way from here to the tube. Facing the unknown. I was a student taking a degree!! It was a lovely feeling on the tube. Then other things hit, like making tea and reality. " (I, 8: 033/9)

Field record:SO YOU WERE LOOKING AT YOURSELF AS A WOMAN IN YOUR REAL LIFE? It became more accentuated. For example, my mother role. A woman's place. I felt frustrations of that, my own experience of that role. Also the tensions and conflicts when my husband saw what I was doing as a hobby but then it became a threat to his position and our relationship. One time we were not getting on, he was blocking everything I was trying to say. He had to grow. I wrote him a long letter, telling him about my values and everything. it worked. He had to sit and read it. This eased the tension. At last he could see what I was getting at. He admitted that my gaining that knowledge was real, not a hobby and the possible result was going to work. He could see it either as a threat to all we had or he had to change. But I told him all the barriers against my going back to my old life. (I, 8: 030/13) AT WHICH POINT DID THESE THINGS COME TO A HEAD? In the initial stages at O level. I was feeling more confident. You were aware that something was happening to you. I didn't understand what it was though. And then there was a lot of tension and conflict. I wrote the letter when I was doing the A levels. DO YOU STILL HAVE THE LETTER? He does. I re-read it a year ago. It seemed just as relevant to then as it does to now. I am stil going through changes. (I, 8: 036/16)

Darcy

Field Record: I ASKED HER IF AT THIS TIME IN HER LIFE, WHEN SHE SHELVED HER BOOKS, IF SHE HAD ANY CONSCIOUSNESS, INTELLECTUALLY, EMOTIONALLY OF HER SELF AS A LEARNER? It was still unconscious. But I can pinpoint when I became aware. The exact moment. When I was at (previous firm) I moved back to _____. I was still in Marketing and Sales. I loved it, all the activity and being allowed to use my skills. I then saw a job going at the Technological College. 'Secretary to Head of Department of Social Science'. I filled in this huge form. I was really nervous, but I thought the hell with it. There was a big space for qualifications. I wrote, 'I have no formal qualifications but my experience is...' Little did I know I was right for this man. Perfect. Then I became aware. I was dealing with 16, 17 year olds who were taking exams. Going on to university. HOW OLD WERE YOU AT THIS TIME. 26, 27. I felt that I have far more to give than they do. he encouraged me to take some courses, and I did. Then, I was very excited about formal education. I took the Sociology A level and only did half the syllabus but the Principal of the College objected to the times I attended and I started studying in April. I got a 'C' in the exam in June and I thought, 'Great!' Suddenly, I became aware of the fact that there was so much to learn, so many ways to go. " (I, 7: 76/11)

Vera

Field record: "and I did the only one available on the night I could go which was Biology but my husband had to promise that he would be home on Wednesday night and that was the only night he could seriously assure me he would be home so I could go out. And I didn't mind doing Biology because I had quite liked it at school and it was a very interesting experience. All women, mature women, about eight of us in the beginning, and we got down to four, and I really enjoyed that experience of being with a lecturer and four or five other people studying and I found it interesting. Just being with them. " (VI, 8: 089/2-3)

Field record: "She really put the idea into my head at this interview. Then I was lucky enough to get a part time library job in a sixth form college but it was a clerk's job and I knew more about the library than the librarian and I got very frustrated because I was running it but I wasn't being paid to run it and that really made me ('grrr') and then my mother in law died which meant I was free of that responsibility and my husband was posted abroad and my eldest daughter went to boarding school and I could see that my days were going to be completely free and I had read about Hillcroft somewhere and I wrote in. I came for an interview. [ref brochure she saw] It's green now, it used to be yellow. It has all those things on it. 'Hillcroft helps you to learn in depth, reassess your individual capability, etc. And the leaflet said all sorts of things that really appealed and I came for an interview and [was] offered a place. Fully residential." (VI, 8: 022/5).

Karen

Field record Tired, exhausted but enthusiastic. The tutor was great. She was not much older than me and we just connected. I was the only person over 20 in the class. It was funny because I approached it in a completely different way. I was much more questioning than I was at school. I got lots of positive feedback from the tutor. It was great you can give another angle. So I felt very enthusiastic. I was just inspired by it but the reality was very very exhausting. I had chosen 19th century English. My favourite time warp. I ending up doing this privately because of her ending up doing twentieth century on the only night she could go. After four sessions, she resigned because she was not teaching what she had counted on. (She had just graduated) Three of us ended up doing private lessons. Round her kitchen table. WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DOING BIOLOGY AND ENGLISH? The same in terms of shovelling information and spewing it out. Different in that the teachers were much closer, more discussion. Biology was more school like. I enjoyed the different style of teaching. Maybe it's just the teachers. I don't know. The value of what you have to say. FEELING VALUED Yes. Real revelation from school. Really close relationship with tutors. Everything you said was discussed. I think I was lucky there. SO YOU HAVE ALWAYS HAD VERY POSITIVE EXPERIENCES AS AN ADULT? As an adult, but not at school . I hated school WHAT ELSE BESIDES COMPETITION [ref to earlier comment in interview] INHIBITED YOU AT SCHOOL? Scholarship, money, religion, treated as children. you were treated as a child. You weren't respected as a person. " (V, 8: 61/3-4)

Frank

Field record:*[Frank] was my only interview today and the weather was foul. When I walked into the coffee bar at 2:00 as arranged on the day before, I was greatly relieved to see him. He was just sitting down to eat his lunch. He greeted me with a sardonic smile. "Hello. I'm afraid my morning meeting ran over so I'm just eating my lunch. " (I Laughed) I REMEMBER YOU SAYING YESTERDAY THAT YOU DON'T LIKE TO EAT AND TALK AT THE SAME TIME SO I'LL POP UPSTAIRS AND LEAVE A NOTE FOR SOMEONE WHILE YOU'RE EATING. He looked distinctly surprised and said, no, that was o.k. I persisted: : TAKE A BREAK. I'LL COME BACK IN ABOUT 15 MINUTES. He was still surprised but his look convinced me I had done the right thing in terms of relaxing him and beginning to secure his trust and to create a more relaxed atmosphere for what I hoped would be an in-depth interview. I returned as indicated I asked him if he was restricted by time: 'Not really, but as I said yesterday, I'm not sure how much I'll want to tell you or how much you'll want to get from me, for that matter.*

I asked if we could just generally explore themes and issues as they arise and that he should feel free to indicate if there were any areas which he didn't want to pursue. I also said I would take notes indiscriminately so I could sift later. Said I didn't want to prejudge what was important. He indicated that would be fine.

Reflection: 2/85: He was still suspicious, guarded, unsure of my motives. I asked him if he could tell me about himself, as a learner both in school and out. (Note: The day before he had spoken about reading my letter of introduction)

"Right. (he leaned forward) Let's start at the beginning. I went to a state run infant school, then a comprehensive. I left at 15 with no qualifications and became an apprentice painter, decorator. Shall I go on? (I indicated yes, as you wish.) I forget how old I was when I started to think about O's and A's. About..

(Reflection: At this point I thought he said, 19-20. I reflected it back, saying: I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE THAT MATURE! We both laughed and he distinctly relaxed. Frank: Early 20's. Late '60's. Early '70's. I was really bored with painting. I also consumed large numbers of books. I started with a correspondence course and did a few lessons at O level, but eventually I got fed up with how it was presented. I ASKED WHICH SUBJECTS? British constitution, English, Logic, History. I decided what the hell and arranged to take the exams as an external student.

Field record: *I ASKED HIM TO TELL ME ABOUT THE KINDS OF BOOKS HE WAS READING AT THE TIME. Reflection: Rather than ask him how he did, I felt that to push open the boundaries on 'learning, being a learner'. I had to from the outset be seen to be valuing formal and nonformal learning equally. Very aware of this yesterday with [Diane] Conditioning to talk about learning in terms of achievement, grades, etc strong! History, political history, psychology, philosophy, some theology, sociology and a bit of economics and current affairs. Mostly library books. When I was unemployed, I used to read 9 books per week. I ASKED IF HE HAD OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCUSS THE IDEAS IN THE BOOKS. He said there were no people around me to discuss with. My dad felt threatened. My mum worried. Kept saying, You can't do A levels. You're not intelligent enough. But I got A grades. But they were caught up in the 'mystique of exams', seeing them as an 'insurmountable barrier'. I had taken a lot of that on myself too. When I passed my O's I was surprised. Had an inferiority complex. Still feel that complex. To do with being working class. Intellectually and socially conditioned to not believe I would do these things.*

I ASKED WHAT HAPPENED AFTER HE PASSED HIS O's. I bumped into an exteacher. Coincidence. Car knocked down a girl who was the daughter of one of my ex teachers. She was very upset. I hadn't witnessed it but I waited with her for the ambulance and went up to the hospital with her. We became friendly. I started going around to her house and her mum kept pushing for me to do A levels. You see, at school, I had always been known as an underachiever. I was told that, but I didn't believe it. I also had a block on maths. I ASKED HIM WHY HE THOUGHT THAT WAS. I remember in primary school and a time when I couldn't do a simple addition. A teacher made fun of me. From that time on I shut off completely.

Reflection: By this point, Frank was talking fairly openly. Still somewhat hesitant in elaborating but non-verbal reflection and the fact that I could be seen to be taking 'indiscriminate' notes seemed to encourage him.

Theoretical note: This reinforces previous experiences [ie in work with white working class women on trainer training courses, with black people in community education) of adults carrying with them back into formal learning painful memories of teachers who, through sarcasm, ridicule and sometimes open sadistic cruelty, leave scars that adult learners 'bring back' with them into formal and nonformal learning environments.

Field record: I was always in the middle range. Teachers always thought I should be in the A stream. I once took an IQ test and was told I was above average. This particular English teacher who I ran into later had always kept on at me and so was doing the same now. So I decided to go to the local technical college as a mature student. Assumed I would get a grant. But I imagined all sorts of problems. That others would be more clever, would be snobs. They accepted me onto a Social Studies Course. A level sociology, Social Economic History and English, but I couldn't get a grant. Lived in ____ LEA. Reactionary lot. I was interviewed and they kept beating about the bush, but finally said. 'You must do it at your own expense.' They said I should have done it at school. (He added derisively. : Corpulent gentleman on a large salary asked me why I wanted to do it. I said, I need some qualifications. I don't like my work. He said, 'Why don't you get a job as a farm labourer? '[...]

Reflection: Was struck by this graphic description of the barriers posed to him: financial, attitudinal. He also now was feeling more relaxed and with no probing from me was talking freely. He went on to say that, :

It's probably different in the U.S. but in the U.K. there is a rigid class structure. I come from a manual working class background. You grow up thinking, that something is wrong with you if you think something else. But I did the course the first year, drawing on my savings. He then looked at my notepad and said, , 'I'm not too happy about you writing this next bit down. ' (I put down my pen) But the second year I was on social security, as a part time student. I interjected, with a laugh. I said I had no connection with anyone to reveal that- and moreover, what I was looking at was learners. it was all confidential. So he wouldn't be singled out: 'O.K., you can write it down.' He paused momentarily, remembering: ' What really pissed me off was signing on when the English class was doing Orwell. That was one of the more interesting bits. One of the few, for that matter and I had to miss it. It was a real hassle. I had twenty miles to travel and because I was unemployed I had to wait for the County Council Coach which was free. If I didnt catch it I was stuck. So when I signed on, I had to hitch a ride. I ASKED IN WHAT WAYS HE PURSUED HIS INTEREST IN ORWELL. He said that is was part of the English Mode 3 coursework. but that he ended up writing a long essay on politics. *Reflection: I felt he didnt want to elaborate on this (Note: he did later on) I ASKED HIM TO EXPLORE SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES HE FOUND BETWEEN INITIAL SCHOOLING AND THIS RETURN AS A MATURE STUDENT.*

Field record: I was always overwhelmed by the whole business of school. I also felt isolated intellectually. We were put into streams and I was in with the brighter group, but I had problems with exams. Also, I was not socially accepted by most of the people in the upper stream. When I went to college, I only wanted a discussion forum. You were forced to sit through lectures. But rather than sit, I would engineer arguments, with the lecturers and with other students. There were no small seminars but the passivity irritated me. [...] WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR FEELINGS DURING THIS TIME AS A LEARNER? One of excitement really. Because I was finally away from manual work. Something else was happening. I felt I might have a chance of a more interesting job. But I also felt great feelings of frustration because the people around me were not much more intelligent than the people I was working with. Some of the lecturers were quite dim and the rest were reticent about saying something. . When I was at technical college, I still had the problem of speaking in front of people but I was much less inhibited than when I was at school. Even though the majority in each subject were under 25 and had failed their A levels at the local grammar school (He laughed) I think they were frightened of me. I took a rigid Marxist line. *He smiled mischievously and ensured that I was still writing indiscriminately!*

APPENDIX 33

SHORT COURSES AS A ROUTE BACK

Andrea

Field record: WHAT WERE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT, THIS THING YOU WERE SAYING, THAT YOU WERE WANTING TO MATURE IN YOURSELF. WHAT WERE SOME OF THE FORCES, THE KINDS OF LEARNING THAT WERE TAKING PLACE? I think it was just looking for something outside of the family circle. I had done a lot of things. Like arts and crafts, woodwork and metal work and pottery and crafts and that sort of thing and loved fiddling about within the house but suddenly I began to look outside the home and I think it was the children were maturing and I was encouraging them to be independent and to do things and think for themselves and I had such a good relationship with my children I thought it was unfair that they should have a conscious about going off and doing what they wanted to do. THAT'S RIGHT. WHAT YOU WERE DESCRIBING THIS MORNING. Yeah, so I thought if I fulfill myself as well it won't matter. They can say, we can go out because mother isn't going around the bend. That's how it started and it just went from there. THAT'S WHEN YOU DID THE RETURN TO LEARNING? I said to my daughter, I must start being more positive about things. I have always been inclined to let things just wash over me and I kept saying, Oh I must have a go at that someday and I never do and I came back with this leaflet from the library about Hillcroft and a few days later, she said, 'Have you filled it in, ' and I said, No, and she said, 'What happened to your resolve?' (laughter) So I filled it in. THAT'S LOVELY. SO THEY HAVE BEEN AROUND DURING THE COURSE? Yes, my daughter has been at [named poly] , done one year. SO THEY WERE ENCOURAGING YOU ALL THE WAY THROUGH. Absolutely. (VI, 8: 037/3-4)[...]SO YOU SAID THAT IT FELT QUITE DIFFERENT COMING INTO HERE. COULD YOU JUST TELL ME SOME OF THE WAYS IT FELT DIFFERENT TO YOU? TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE SPECIFICS: Oh yes, I started to tell you that people who went on to HE from school were a breed apart and the thoughts of coming back into education, I think I felt quite the same about it. So if I heard about other housewives who had gone off and done something, I thought, 'Oh dear' They must be ever so different but to come here and to be treated as an equal by the tutors was an absolute eye opener. THAT YOU COULD BE AN EQUAL (nodded) And Phoebe (the principal) went out of her way, if you said, 'Only a housewife' She goes through the roof. ' (laughter) (VI, 8: 058/13)[...]WAS THERE SOMETHING ABOUT A WOMAN'S COLLEGE THAT APPEALED TO YOU BECAUSE YOU HAD GONE TO A GIRLS' SCHOOL? IT WAS ALSO NEARBY...Oh quite yes, and let's also face it, it was easy. I don't think I would have ever have got in on it if it had been up to me to go to do my own O levels and A levels. I would never have had that awareness that I could have done it. YOU MEAN PASSING ALL THOSE OBSTACLES FIRST? Yes, and the college gave you this attitude, there is nothing to stop you. And it really just made it there for you. [...] It is quite a phenomenon I think and I don't think the DES is quite happy about this strange place so obviously they want to maximise, and we have been asked on several occasions, 'Don't you think we ought to take me in and it's my opinion that we shouldn't. I am not one of these that women must be on their own. But I think it offers

opportunities to people. they wouldn't gain the same opportunities if men were here. There are no two ways about it, men do dominate and I think this, the situation here allows women to be themselves and to come out. (VI, 8: 057/21)

Nicole

Field record: HOW ABOUT IF WE STARTED WITH HOW YOU GOT HERE AND THEN WE CAN GO BACK IN TIME [...] I came here because I felt that I had completely missed out on formal education. Although I did go to a convent school and I did take O levels, I didn't do very well. I think I was just lazy. I didn't like school very much. I had a few domestic problems at home and I only had a couple of O levels. That didn't bother me at the time. [note: In Chapter 6, it may be recalled Nicole's account of her disjunction with regard to class, exacerbated by the arrival of what was regarded at the time as an 'illegitimate' baby at home] [...] I got married very early at 18, began my family at 19. I didn't ever think about education or the need for it until my children began to get older and suddenly I realised that there were going to be a lot of years and I had to do something and that is when I began to have regrets. So what I did then, which is, I suppose about 10 years ago, is take a TOPS course to get a proper secretarial qualification. Which I did and did part time secretarial work. But I thought this is not what I want to be doing all the time and and there weren't many options open to me and at that time, Good Housekeeping magazine ran a one day seminar for women, coming to the change, and trying to figure out what direction to take and it seemed to sort of be aimed at me and they told me about Hillcroft. WAS THAT IN LONDON? Yes, although my home was [over 100 miles away] Well, I just listened to what was available and [she spoke about how she also considered a computer course] so I rang up for details, from that point of view, just to see what was available and when I got here I learned about it and said, 'This is me' and what I want to do. So I spoke to the family to see how they felt about it HOW MANY KIDS DO YOU HAVE? Three and they were fine, they said, 'Yes, if that is what you want to do, great! And if they hadn't I would never have gone ahead, because I would not have had the confidence, but the fact that they were willing, and my husband didn't mind. I applied and that's it. That's how I came to be here. (VI, 8: 037/2-3)

APPENDIX 34a

DIRECT ENTRY:
TO TRADITIONAL HIGHER EDUCATIONJanice

Field record:She said all her life people had been saying to her, 'Why don't you got to college? ' But that she had always felt she wasn't good enough. But once she got in, she realised she couldn't think that because she was 'stuck now'. Also, she was determined to go through with it, since she had only just split up from her husband the year before, the divorce had just come through, and her son was at school from 10-3.30. "so everything fitted in. There was no time to get nervous", she laughed. "And I was motivated. And since I don't have the right qualifications, I was proving myself from the beginning that I could do it. (I, 8: 33/3)

Fran

Field record:When I left there I didn't know what to do and I went to see a careers chap and he asked me what I had done and said, 'Why don't you go do a degree [...] and my first reaction was 'No, I can't'. I'm not bright enough and he said, 'Well, try it'. So I tried for a grant first, and when they said I could have a grant I applied for __. (...) I spent from January to September and tried to find a way out of it. Even to an extent that I went to my local M.P. and asked if Mrs. Thatcher would lend me £5000 to rent a little shop and he said 'NO, we can't do that. But she was going to spend £3-000 re-educating me, but if she lent me £5000... SO YOU SPENT THIS TIME TRYING TO GET OUT OF IT. WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR FEELINGS? I was frightened. WHAT DID YOU THINK IT MEANT? I don't know. I didn't think about what it meant. I just went to see the building and I did these horrendous entrance tests they subject you to. Stop" Turn the page over, Stop! 11 minutes to turn the page over, Stop! and I was scared stiff and he then asked if I wanted to see the building and I said no, I'm going home.I ran all the way to the station and I never wanted to go back again. My first year I played at it really. I couldn't give up hairdressing. In fact, I still haven't (laughter) (I, 8:4/7-8)

Georgette

Field record:"started to fail and I did that very successfully, and left in the lower sixth. But it was all rote, no thinking. Just like a prison, just learning off one long list of one subject versus another. [...] I became more and more successfully disruptive and I decided this wasn't for me. So left at 17 and thought it's time to start living. " (I, 6: /10) My husband wanted to be an artist and we managed to save up some money and all was going well. but then my baby was born with congenital abnormalities and I spent a lot of time in hospital and became interested in psychology because as a parent there seemed to be no provision made whatsoever for the psychological well being of the parent. As a mother you can't say anything. Any suggestions you make, you are just sneered at, labelled, and I had

always thought I would do a degree and then I saw an ad in the paper for a part-time course. But then I thought, what have I let myself in for? Reading hieroglyphics? (I, 8: 82/12-13)[...] First I went as a part-time student and I was glad to get asked. it was my self motivation, so if I failed I could do it quietly. Slip out the back door. [I, 8: 83/34)

Ethel

Field record:I decided that I wanted to teach ESN children. I figured I would need a degree in psychology. I decided I must apply. Spend some years training so I could go teach them. I had swallowed the Keith Joseph edict about higher education.(...)I later spent the day with a friend at an ESN school. The men were physically disabled also. I couldn't carry them. I assumed I couldn't carry them, since I am disabled myself. So much for that. But I decided to do the degree anyway. It's a passport, isn't it. It don't mean anything else, does it. You take your exams and that's it. What I call the annual propitiation of the gods. *Observation/reflection, 3/85: Noticed how as [Ethel] relaxed she spoke increasingly in Cockney. Took it as a compliment!* (I, 8: 27/6)

Field record:'I had flu and it was a Monday in September when I had been at this technical college for three weeks (I hated it) I decided I will 'phone the poly. I asked, 'How many A levels do I need'. Then it got all confused. [She insisted on one department] I was on the 'phone all day. They then 'phoned back and suggested I go to evening classes [meaning part time study] 'This would take 4 years, (vs doing A levels plus 3 years) I rang the tutor at 3:30. He said, 'wouldn't you rather do the full time course? I said, 'I have no A levels. I have been out of education for 20 years. He said, 'Where are you 'phoning from?' I said , '____'. 'Come for an interview and start lectures on Monday. ' Well I told the college lecturers and [Diane] got the phone number. I told her to 'phone him also: 'Tell him you're interested . ' By the end of the day, we had both signed up for a semi interview. The course tutor was bringing in people off the street. And here I was with flu up to my eyeballs. It's all riotously funny on reflection. The story of my life - a dead shambles. Pure accidents, one after another. (I, 8: 21/2) [She went on to describe her strictly functional view of the degree]SO WHAT IT MEANT TO YOU WAS TAKING THE EXAMS? WHAT OTHER EXPECTATIONS? I'm 100% honest. Naive. Straightforward. I expect everyone else to be the same. So lots of times I put my foot in it. During the first week, someone else aid, 'What about the interview? What exams have you had?' Well, I came in through the back door, didn't I? The one for mature students! But they didn't know that. They were horrified. They assumed everybody else had to do what they did. I was sure top of the hit parade for the first few days. Like one person. I said, 'Y'know how Diane got here? Spoke to someone a week ago. I let her go on and be all shocked like and then I said, 'Me too'. She didn't speak to me for over a year. ! So I had no expectations. I had been out of academic life for twenty years. Had been sent down the first time in Infants School in [____] Then went to the Juniors. At 17 had some O levels but had to leave to get job. " (I, 8: 22/7-8)

APPENDIX 34b

'DIRECT ENTRY' VIA HILLCROFT

Nancy

Field record...and here [referring to Hillcroft] they push you [towards doing a degree] and for most people, it works out. They are determined to get a degree and that is their aim. But it was never mine. I came here purely out of interest, intrigue and to find out for myself what I could do and I feel I proved that to myself. " (V, 8: 84/5)

Field recordWell, I thought I could never go for a degree course straight away. I just didn't have the confidence and I had never written anything, I suppose, you know and I only went for this place really because it was in Surrey, near my parents' home, near London and I thought well, that would suit me down to the ground. SO WHEN YOU CAME YOU HAD AN INTERVIEW. WAS IT WHAT YOU EXPECTED? WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS? I didn't really know what to expect, I don't think. I remember when I sent off for an application form and they said, fill in this form, put down a list of books you've read and I thought, I put the form away. I just can't fill in this form. HAD YOU READ MUCH? (It was just that you, you had to give your views on it and I thought, Oh, I can't do that. But in the end I did it. But I thought they won't give it to me anyway. But then it came through from Phoebe [the principal] and I came up to see her and then you had to do a little test and I said, well after that, they won't want me. Everything I did. I thought, No, I'm just not the person they're looking for. And a week later, they're saying, If you want it, you can have a place. I was really pleased because I had read the things they had given out, the prospectus and everything and I thought, Well, I might as well try it now. Well the way I was feeling. So that's what happened, yeah. " (V, 8: 59/18)

Victoria

Field record:I liked the fact that it was a woman's college and that it was an adult residential college. This felt right for me, since I had been twenty years out of education. Learn alongside youngsters? No. I am in awe of 18 year olds and I needed to build up on my confidence. Women were no threat to me. [...] My goal was to get to university. I didn't know if I was capable of that. But I had the energy, the drive. Despite having three children. But I figured Hillcroft would give you time to find out. " " (I, 8: 43/2-3)

APPENDIX 35

THE 'PROFESSIONALS': MOVING TOWARDS AND IN AND OUT

Amy

Field Record:WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DO YOU FEEL YOU NEED AT THIS STAGE? It is the end of a long process. It took me eighteen months to decide on which course. [At one point] I wanted to do pure research. I talked to a lot of people and got accepted to do what you're doing with just supervision, because of my [particular] interests. So I had that offer, but I held back. Then I had a crisis in terms of my career. I didn't want to be a head. I decided to go for [this] course. [Discusses its relevance to professional recognition] After saying I didn't want a taught course, I realise I probably needed something like a taught course, part research course and it also gives me personal recognition. So my expectations of this are the discipline of a new career which will give me the discipline of a new career. " (II, 8: 018/40)

Derek

Field record:I would have been back two years previously but I was promoted and turned down for secondment. They held the place for me. WHY? I wanted to get back into an intellectually stimulating environment. I felt rusty, cobwebs in my faculties. My capacity for intellectual argument is jaded. I need an injection, especially with my teaching. (II, 4:88/37)

Jane

Field record: ...about a couple of years ago I decided I would like to get out of teaching and I made a half-hearted attempt. I didn't know what else I wanted to do. I decided on the M.A. One reason was that I made such a hash of my B.Ed that I wanted to prove myself I wasn't a failure again. (II, 8: 027/26) SO A CAREER CHANGE? Partly, but I wouldn't have done it for that. But the interest thing is the main thing. Even if I get nothing from it career wise, I would still want to do it. (II, 8:026/27)

Sheila

Field record:WHEN YOU THINK NOW ABOUT ALL THE EXPERIENCES YOU HAVE HAD LEARNING UP UNTIL NOW, ANY OTHER COURSE YOU GO ON IN FUTURE, WHETHER IN COLLEGE, OR WHEREVER, DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE CLEAR IDEAS ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT? HAVE THEY CHANGED? HAVE YOUR EXPECTATIONS CHANGED? THE WAYS YOU MIGHT EVALUATE THAT COURSE? I think my expectations have changed anyway. I always felt it was important to do practical things, not the theory. I did [professional qualification] and that was important to get the qualification [...]. I got that to go on to do the job. And the officer in charge who I was working with at the time didn't feel the need to push people out on courses, so everything was quite happy. Doing practical things, and enjoying it and learning a lot from the permanent staff. Getting more and more experience, and then the actual

set up where I was working, it began to change. [...] Things changed. I had to fit to go along with those changes or if not, I wasn't going to get anywhere. I would have been stuck. I was realising I had to do something about it. I wanted to achieve again, and I wanted to do some training, so it was necessary then. SO IN A SENSE YOU KNEW YOU WANTED TO DO SOMETHING WHICH WAS MORE FORMAL IN TERMS OF (Tape turned over) I spoke to the training officer who was already doing the course and told me about the course and spoke to other people who had done the course. I also found the work I was doing was changing and there was more emphasis on working in groups. So there was a different emphasis and things were changing and what I needed to do was to be part of that change. SO TALKING TO PEOPLE TO MAKE SURE THE COURSE WOULD MAKE SENSE TO YOU AT THIS TIME. ANYTHING ELSE YOU FELT YOU NEEDED TO KNOW? Yes, there is a lot of input on the course. I spoke to [one of the tutors] and she talks to you and tells you how the course is run and my training officer had been on the course and was telling me, and I thought I'd like to do that. (III, 8:30/34-35)

APPENDIX 36

MULTIPLE EMPHASES IN 'WHY'S' FOR RETURNING

Todd

Field record: WHY HE? WHAT DID YOU EXPECT OF IT? I had survived 15 years without further study. I had never failed at what I did. There are two different types of people, I think. The career minded where the social life is not important and those with a social life who take a job to finance it. *[Todd associated himself with the latter, his social life being tied up largely with his music]* I had hopes that a larger group of people would accept the way I thought. Also my friend was here and he was full of praise and I knew him well. The changes in him were good. I also thought it would give me breathing space. It would also fit in exactly with my working and family life. (I, 8: 31/7)

Patricia

Field record: My academic aspirations are to challenge and re-examine my present perspective on life by reading upon a wide range of social and political thought in order to stimulate my thinking and draw my own conclusions. Although this has no direct context within my work, it is important in the development of myself in my ability to research the information I need, and even more importantly, having done so, decide what it is I actually conclude from it all. (I, 8: 29/18) Given that I believe there is a connection between how people feel and the environmental and social systems individuals within society have to live, what exactly is it that I believe beyond that, that stems from my own understanding? (I, 8: 28/8)

4. Peter

Field record: HOW DID YOU SEE THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AT THAT TIME? I had not thought about going to university. DID YOU DO A LEVELS IN THE END. Yes. Later I thought about doing geography because I enjoyed it so much at school *[Peter had described his geography teacher as one of his finest, as well as a person for whom he had immense respect]* but I didn't think WHEN YOU SAY YOU HADNT CONSIDERED IT, WAS IT THAT YOU DIDNT WANT TO GO OR I had decided not to go. [...]9IV, 8: 087/37) WHEN YOU LOOK BACK ON IT, DID YOU THINK FORMAL EDUCATION WAS GOING TO PLAY A ROLE IN YOUR LIFE? LIKE WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF FORMAL EDUCATION FOR YOU? No, I think I had become quite suspicious about the motivation of teachers. Like I was saying, at school I did, and no body around me seemed to be talking about any of the things I was interested in and I started to feel like I was reading secret documents, almost a [unclear] feeling for a while, going against the mainstream of things and looking back at it in a political sort of way, I think I was. It is one of the ways that public school can work, but it can also work too much and drive them out of the very current they are trying to get you to swim in. Like brainwashing almost. It was too intense. (IV, 8:186/44) SO YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF FORMAL EDUCATION AT THAT TIME WERE

THAT YOU WOULDNT BE ABLE TO GET WHAT YHOU WANTED AT THAT STAGE? Well, more that I wouldnt know what to go for at university. Iw as really torn as to what to study if I were to go to university and a suspicious that it would be too much of one thing. i was reading literature, psychology, a bit of philosphy, around what I was interested in rather than - Like it was Camus, Sartre and things like that. (I, 8: 085/45)

APPENDIX 37

ANTICIPATING

Vera:

Field record: In many ways. I was talking to a friend the other day, because my husband wasn't very well and she saw him walking along the road and he looked a very old man and well, he isn't. He's in his early 50's and he thinks he is, and she said, 'You must realise he feels very threatened by you at the moment. If you succeed and get your degree and get a good job, you will be financially independent and he is very fearful of that. I was aware of it before she said it but it was quite good she reminded me of it. You do have to take account of it. You are a threat in a way. Your development threatens your marriage because if you can't be tolerant about his lack of THE CHANGES Yeah. It's a very sobering thought that you might be threatening the whole of your family life just because you are putting your personal development, a higher priority AN EQUAL PRIORITY? Yes, equal, but at times it even has to be higher than other things or otherwise you wouldn't get there. EQUAL ACROSS A SPAN OF TIME? Yeah, yeah, LIKE YOU SAID, IT'S TWENTY YEARS TIME. But while you're doing it, that's the time you are doing it, that's the time they're suffering. SO IT FEELS UNEQUAL TIME

Darcy

Field record: [after doing her A levels at the FE college, having encouraged by her boss] "Then I was very excited about formal education (...) Suddenly I became aware of the fact that there was so much to learn, so many ways to go. "

APPENDIX 38

FIRST ENCOUNTERS: MAKING SENSE OF A NEW WORLD

Vera, Janet, and Andrea

Field Record: LET'S GO FORWARD TO HILLCROFT, WHEN YOU CAME HERE, SOME OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS, FEARS, ANXIETIES AND HOW DO YOU THINK THEY HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF LEARNING YOU HAD BEEN INVOLVED WITH BEFORE. IF YOU CAN JUST REMEMBER THAT FIRST WEEK...I was terrified (laughter) When I first came here, I just wanted to go home (She mimicked: 'I want my mummy') It was awful. HOW WAS THAT? It was just all too much. I wasn't used to being educated again and you had to make up your mind about courses you were going to take in that week and get to know everybody and the students and the tutors and you had to cope with all of those things and little pieces of work. I used to go home and collapse in front of the television. It was all too much. (VI, 9: 047/23) ANDREA: Not as traumatic for me because I had been on short courses. The returning to learning courses. [...] WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE WHEN YOU CAME ON THAT COURSE It was a big step. It was entry into a different world, really. [...] (VI, 8: 048/25) VERA: I felt pressurised into making decisions about options we were going to take and having to put this package together. People kept saying, 'Have you thought about your package. Are you thinking about your package. And I had this vision of twenty women all sitting at this table with brown paper and string deciding how we were going to wrap up our packages. And you were meeting lecturers who were teaching various things and they told you about how they taught, and what they were trying to do. I had some ideas about what I wanted but there were so many alternatives and every time a teacher spoke I thought, gosh, I would like to do that too! ANDREA: There are so many alternatives. After so many years, should you take the subjects you like or aim at what you want to do in the future or should you just have the subjects that went together? JANET: And other people seemed so firm. But then you learned later that they changed their minds (VI, 8: 049/26) WHAT WOULD HAVE MADE THAT FIRST YEAR EASIER FOR YOU ALL? JANET: Valium! (laughter) ANYTHING ELSE? Rescue remedy, herbal tonics, health shop (lots of chatter all at once about remedies) But it is an eternal problem. ANDREA: I think it was a problem for the college as well. VERA: But there was a lot of emphasis on what do you want to do when you leave. And that was hard. Too much concentration on the future, rather than on what we wanted to do 'now'. I mean, you didn't even know if you could do it. As you get into the education game, and I realise it is a game, you realise it doesn't matter which course you take. Like kids who want to go on to universities. Do 'A' levels. And it's taking them and doing well, not what you take that matters, and this constant talk about packages in relation to what you were going to do when you left was very confusing in that first week and it tensed people up more than was necessary. The fact that people even got here was a huge step for many women [...] and people hadn't even thought about their choices and they wanted help with their choices but they were being bombarded with the fact that these choices were going to affect the rest of their lives and we used to find ourselves

in a situation where we had to make a decision in a day that was going to affect us and it was just, I don't think it was completely fair . I think that it's a stage you are at. You are physically tired as well (Yeah, yeah, from group) I remember me, I had been home with my children on the school holidays and I had torn around the house physically cleaning and then the mental anguish. JANET: I had work problems on Friday and then on the Monday you suddenly change the whole of you life. It is turned upside down and it is absolutely shattering. It changes the whole temperature of your life. (VI, 8: 050/27)

Gaynor

Field Record: I think it is very difficult for the tutor to put themselves in the position of the student who has no knowledge whatsoever, so I think it needs a fairly gentle introduction. I found this particularly with art history, that it was overwhelming me and we seemed to be , and a couple of times I felt I was sinking under the mass of information and sort of, I remember [the lecturer] making a comment, fairly early on like, ' Of course you all would recognise a Michelangelo and I just sat there and thought, Gosh, am I really expected to do that at this stage. And that was a bit disheartening in a way because I felt she expected me to have that kind of knowledge and I knew I was nowhere near. Now, at the end of one semester, I would have a stab at it and I think there may be other painters I maybe could identify which to me is quite an achievement but early on, it was daunting to have that sort of remark made. [...] To have absolutely no base at all, I think, a lot of them, even with the literature, talking about authors, books, names that to me were just names that didn't mean a thing. Without that background it is quite a lot to take on board and a bit daunting. " (VII, 9: 261/19)

APPENDIX 39

A SENSE OF INTEGRATION UPON ENTRY

Sheila

Field Record::HOW ABOUT , LIKE THIS COURSE. ARE THERE ANY OTHER THINGS WHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS RUNNING A COURSE WHICH MAKES YOU FEEL MORE ABLE TO TALK AND BE YOURSELF THAN AT OTHER TIMES? At the beginning yes, I have to know people. What I found about this course is time to talk about it to one another, about different issues. About how you feel. What this course is about. Human experience. Your feelings. Not feeling criticised for having your own feeling really. That's your opinion, not going to be criticised for it. THE FIRST FEELINGS ABOUT IT BEING DIFFICULT? Was getting to know people and to say what you feel, what's good and what's bad. Part of learning, but some things can be quite painful. ARE THERE THINGS FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE THAT PEOPLE SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T DO TO MAKE THAT PROCESS EASIER? In the group situations we are in now, you know people to start with, so you have a lot more trust and how people feel and in what situations people feel able to talk and in what situations they don't. Respecting that. (III, 8: 68, 69/26-27)

Field record::...the set up where I was working began to change. [...] Things changed. I had to fit to go along with those changes or if not, I wasn't going to get anywhere. I would have been stuck. I was realising I had to do something about it, if I wanted to achieve again. and I wanted to do some training, so it was necessary than [...]Spoke to training officer who was already doing the course and told me about the course and spoke to other people who had done the course. (III, 8: 30/34)

Sally

Field Record::Certainly the first year, everything was as expected. I can honestly say that for years, I have not been so happy. I didn't miss the train. When I think I am usually late for work everyday, but not here. Would wake up full of enthusiasm for what I was going to learn. So my expectations were met. The tutors were very very helpful. There were problems in the college itself, but these couldn't be overcome. I liked the atmosphere, the freedom - the relative freedom. Quite restricted in a way. Very full programme. And you are expected to turn up for most things. But yes, it was everything for me that school wasn't. If you didn't feel well, you could go home. If you didn't want to eat here, you didn't have to. Everything I found anathema about school wasn't true here. For me it was learning without the nasty bits. ((V, 8: 60/40)

Victoria

Field Record::SO YOUR COMING TO HILLCROFT WAS TIED UP WITH YOUR LEARNING IN TERMS OF THE WOMEN'S GROUP? Yeah. AND IN WHAT WAYS HAS IT BEEN SIMILAR, THE SAME OR DIFFERENT FROM THAT GROUP? It has been the same really, because we are a very mixed bunch of people here. Some are very politically motivated, others aren't and don't want to be so we still have the same sorts of arguments but we are all women. We are very supportive of each other and understanding of each other and here we've all had time to think about things. That first year gives you time to understand and think about what you want to do when you've left or maybe you'll feel strong enough not to want to do anything. You don't have to. Nobody makes you do anything. You get all the encouragement in the world if you want to. But nobody actually says you've got to be doing this, that and the other. Nobody makes you. But it's there if you want it. And you could be quite confident to say yeah. But also [you can say] it's a good thing in itself and don't want to do anymore. IT'S LEGITIMATE TO SAY THAT? Yeah. And even legitimate not to even worry about whether you've passed or failed. Just to have done the course. The experience of it, yeah. It's a shame in some respects that it is exam oriented, but I don't know how to justify that. I don't know. I was just thinking if it wasn't, you couldn't go on to do anything else. (V, 8: 62/25)

APPENDIX 40

TRANSITIONS ACROSS DIFFERENT FORMAL LEARNING
CONTEXTS: SECOND FIRST ENCOUNTERSSally

Field Record:: I was going to write you and say I really don't like this at all (laughter). 'This university is dreadful' and I can't say that, this is silly, I have only been here a few weeks, haven't given a fair chance, so I ripped that up and then a few weeks later I thought I will try to be more objective about this and I found myself writing, 'I really don't like this university', much the same kind of thing, and I felt very disappointed. I had expected to find stimulating conversations, and I hadn't found any of those things. Many of the younger students are interested in the beer that flows in the student unions, not all by any means, but I did find quite a percentage of this and mature students obsessed with getting through it, obsessed with getting qualifications and they have all been struck dumb with such terror and they have been unemployed, haven't got jobs, obsessed with getting the best degree and getting a doctorate. you know, I don't know what a PhD or a doctorate is but quite frankly I'm not really concerned. I'd only just gotten my foot inside the door for a degree and they all seem to be obsessed with getting on. " (VII, 9: 107, p. 25)

Field record:(Reading) 'Hope this will be challenging' I haven't really found it to that extent. Well, in a way it has, in terms of coping, but not so much in learning. 'Deep suspicion it won't be as open minded' Absolutely true. Every bit of that is true. 'Both tutors and fellow students' Yes. 'I expect to become disillusioned about my [subject] in lots of ways. ' Yes, I have, but I still hang on to it. I think it is one of the greatest subjects, has great potential. Yeah, about all I can say about that. And finally, 'liking the atmosphere [this was after sh had visited for the interview] Yes, I found that I definitely wa disappointed in some things like when I went to the interview and there was a terrific amount of foreign students and I thought, 'Oh, this will be great' So I had a really big choice of people to meet. But you do very little mixing and they have Chinese evenings and Islamic, but you feel afraid to go on and you don't know people. YOU NEED INFORMAL WAYS OF MIXING? Like in my department, there aren't any of those people. They mainly do post-graduate and are in other departments like economics and it's a shame we don't meet more. [...] AND HERE READING, 'FELT YOU WOULD TREAD WATER' Yeah, I am afraid that is much the feeling. I am waiting to see what comes next. (VII, 9: 108/60)

Janet

Field Record::TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST YEAR THERE, I kept thinking, this is what it feels like to learn. There was also much the same stimulation, people with ideas, Being triggered. This should be true

of any learning. Being stimulated, stretched. Also, doing my first essay. I thought that would be difficult. Because you set yourself a standard. But that was the same as here. It is not so much what they expect, but what you expect. You want to go further each time. You try different approaches over time and develop that bit more. If that is not happening, I have difficulty. But most of what I am doing is learning rather than playing the game. [...] But they do have some preconceived ideas and playing the game is important to a point. No point in being wonderful all the time. But you need to make sure people know who you are, because otherwise they forget. and you become a non-person. But at this department, there are three tutors on the staff who are good, and we share a course with _____. Only 15, so it is quite small. " (VI, 9: 034/16)

APPENDIX 41

PRIOR LEARNING AND THE EXPERIENCE OR ANTICIPATION
OF DISJUNCTION UPON ARRIVALSusan

Field Record:: Susan: When I first came I was like a battering ram. I assumed it was not to be enjoyed. But gradually I started relaxing more and enjoying it (not all of it mind you!)(laughter) And there was still the same business as at school. For example, the teachers I get on with, and whose style is interactive learning, great! They make me think that maybe learning can be the way I always thought it should be! I began to think, 'So what's the big deal about computing' I had always loved history and I said to myself, 'Do it!' maybe I'll never use it. On my UCCA form recently I said I wanted to be a historian. So why not? But still this thing that outside, I enjoy learning and inside, you play the game. " (V, 9: 43/11)

Field Record:: I was very enthusiastic when I got there. I think that was part of the problem. I was looking forward to it, with a certain amount of trepidation. But I was, I thought, 'This was going to expand me'. Bigger than Hillcroft. Wider opportunities, etc YOUR FIRST CHOICE? I turned Cambridge down. [...] I was though, perhaps over enthusiastic, my expectations were too high and what happened, I suppose (VII, 09: 79/1-2) And about half way through the first term I was, just, became, very disillusioned. It wasn't that quick. It was growing but that was when it hit me, I suppose, and I did all the things we are supposed to do like joining the clubs and there were two different sorts of problems. One was concerned with the social life, if you like. I hadn't anticipated how difficult it would be to be with so many 18-19 year olds and the other was on the work front. I was just terribly disappointed with that. (VII, 9: 78/3)

Jane

Field Record:: Jane: Consequently I am frightened to death of that [maths] SOME OF THOSE MEMORIES OF THOSE FEARS? Yes, that's right. You would think that at my age I would have come to grips with it really. THOSE MEMORIES CAN BE VERY POWERFUL THOUGH CAN'T THEY. THE HUMILIATION, THE PAIN. That's right (II, 6: 034/4) WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF PEOPLE ON THIS COURSE TEACHING IT IN TERMS OF DEVELOPING YOUR INTERESTS. You mean, how will it affect me now if people feel I can't do it? NO JUST GENERALLY. YOU'VE CHOSEN AGAIN TO DO A TAUGHT COURSE. SO THERE WILL BE OTHERS INVOLVED IN INFLUENCING YOUR LEARNING. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF THEM AS WELL AS OF THE COURSE? Well, I feel more independent of the influence, but I still am influenced by them. I tend to judge my performance by the performance of others around me. For example, statistics. I might have given up if everybody else around me found it easy. Not a way of thinking that comes naturally. Since everyone else seems to be in about the same boat as me, I go home. I can't understand a word of it in the lecture. I go home and I read it and I can understand it. and I

feel reassured by that. And there again, that stems back to my early days. My early experiences. I was so afraid of making a mistake because I had been ridiculed or slapped. Now I have got this terror of figures which is gradually getting less. So I find the statistics bit quite reassuring. It is forcing me to go back to something I found frightening and I am finding I can handle it. " (II, 8: 065/28)

Nicole

Field Record:: I still have difficulty here in that most of the other students seem to relate to the tutors on a fairly equal basis. I still see them as someone to be a little bit scared of. In the year here, I have come to terms with it because of the way they are, because they are, because there isn't that, they don't teach at you. So I suppose that has helped me. " There are different kinds of insecurities. Mine when I came here, was just stopping myself from wanting to blend in. Like going back to my early days, when I didn't want to be seen even with the leaders. To stand out. And funnily enough, today I had to do my very first seminar and this has been a nightmare to me, thinking about it, and that second semester, I actually didn't take the option to do one of the subjects because of having to take it [ie the seminars]((V, 9: 270/18, 20)

Laurence

Field Record:: But I had never written an academic essay and I felt I had no relevant experience. WAS THIS FEELING PERPETUATED? I soon found I could hardly spell and my actual formal grammar needed polishing. But I am good at using words and because of my age and experience, I could express myself well in subjective writing. This was also encouraged. Now I worry I am using that capacity of that subjective writing skill [too much]. I get a bit worried about that. (I, 8: 63/10)

Georgette

Field Record:: I didn't have any esteem, any confidence or any belief in my abilities. And that's come only recently with doing the course. But during the first year [...] I wanted to drop out. Especially statistics. Made myself believe I am no good at stats. And I thought everybody else was making sense of it. Kept saying they were (Fran: I wasn't!) But [I was] part-time. Not much chance to talk. Took me a while to realise they didn't get it also. In fact, knew even less. So I worked very hard and did well. I was working all the way through. But learning has always been stressful for me. really , it is low self esteem that makes it difficult for me. Because I have always done well at the time. (I, 9: 282/21)

APPENDIX 42

CONSTRUCTIVE JARRINGS

Rita

Field record: I still rely on other people to reinforce what I know so that I know what I know. (laughter) THAT'S WHAT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT HERE. (referring to transcript) 'LEARNING MORE ABOUT ME' ANYTHING TRIGGERED? I still need it from other people but I am a little more confident in that if someone is a little down on me I can still say, that is them. it is not necessarily me and knowing that. Not only just the one group, but when that one closed down and people here all seemed to like me, so I must be o.k. (laughter) and its o.k. to be bright with it. Because all the people, my friends here, they are good at some things and not others. but being bright doesn't make it different. AND FEELING IT IS O.K. TO BE BRIGHT AND A PERSON? Right. If I was bright that's all I was valued for but now I think I am bright and still me. RIGHT, WELL, THAT, (looking at watch, sigh) THE PRESSURE OF TIME! I am one of the three presidents of the student union and two extra compementaries and the more effective I am, the more I do. (V, 9:23/1 of Part II of Interview 2 referring back to previous transcript)

PENNY

Field record: ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT HILLCROFT AND YOUR EXPECTATIONS, YOUR NEEDS? It's a wonderful place. Very supportive. Just being with other people and you can get very cheesed off with somebody and you forget they are having a bad day but at the end of the day of women together, of women's solidarity, knowing other women have suffered. As someone said, 'my husband thinks I am doolally.' Gosh! I don't think that. Then you think, gosh, I don't need to worry about that so much maybe. Knowing that that dimension... You need men, but it's a break from men. It's like when , you know, you must clean, etc, but you also need to walk away, build up part of you and then you can tackle whatever it is needs doing and that is good. Along with, I'm sure that women haven't had such good chances in life and these are things that should be obvious. But it's good. (V, 9:62/33)

VERA

Field record [She had previously been speaking about what tutors can do to facilitate learning in adults] ANYTHING ELSE IN THEIR ATTITUDES, THEIR BEHAVIOURS, THAT THEY CAN DO TO BE MORE FACILITATING OF THAT LEARNING PROCESS? To steer things. Sometimes we get off on the wrong track. I think sometimes like the tutor disappears, because he thinks it is less fearful for us, but sometimes it would be nice for somebody to put us back on the right track more easily. But he says, you can do it yourself but you are learning how to do it, which of course is quite right but... A BALANCE THEN? It's all about that. You feel as if you are walking a tightrope. Like appearing to be confident, as I do sometimes, but feeling like jelly inside. Most of the time I feel like

that. I wish I could do it. Sometimes I think I am just pretending to do it. AND IF AT THAT POINT SOMEBODY JUDGES YOU? it's disastrous, isn't it?! Unless they judge you right. Like, 'Well done' for your participation or something. I remember once in a meeting here it was getting quite heated. College issues. I WENT TO ONE OF THOSE. All of a sudden I wanted to say something and stood up and said what I wanted and THIS WAS EARLY ON about term two I think and afterwards several people said that what I said was just right and that was great! I felt good that they said good to me, because if people had ignored what I said afterwards, it would destroy my confidence for doing anything later. (Reflection: women and invisibility...keeping going!) What was good here, people would say, well done. Not at the poly. The students, the kids, still think they are in competition with you like they are for adults, and they are really worried if you have got better marks than them and I find that very negative and I try to talk them out of thinking it matters if they have more or less than somebody else because that is not entirely relevant to being at the Poly. Like I got two very good marks for two early pieces of work and one girl didn't and was upset at her low marks. I said you are lucky you didn't get high. You can gradually improve. I now have to fight like mad to keep up there, and disappoint myself which is bound to happen because there is no way to do the same. At least you have the opportunity! I mean, we are not in competition with each other. I would much rather show gradual improvement over the three years. And I have had good marks and bad marks there. DO THEY APPRECIATE THAT? I don't know. But I do think it is silly to be in competition with the friend next door. You are not. In learning something, we are going to learn at different levels. Understand at different levels. If we didn't, it would be pretty boring. Not all of us are going to be able to write great essays...And I see that competition in the academic world as not worth it. (VI, 9: 020/43-5)

APPENDIX 43a

UNCONSTRUCTIVE JARRINGS:
CONFLICTING MEANINGS FOR LEARNINGDiane

Field record: Diane: I then really began to question what is the purpose of all this. Let me give you another example. I decided at one point that I wanted to do an option in _____. Thought this would be an avenue which would help me. I was like a flower opening up. Willing to learn. After two terms, this flower was crushed. HOW? Because it was all facts. The lecturers made no mention of their own views. Purely concentrated on 'experts', classes of [those experts]. Totally dry. It was terrible. No excitement by the ideas. Just, 'This is the topic. Read these pages in all these books. One hour lecture' (9/I: 94/22 (Interview 1) I remember a time when I was at a lecture on the history and theory of _____. It was done sequentially rather than structured around particular questions. Very complex. I asked the lecturer, "Is there anything you could do to make this simple?" He said, [Diane], I am giving you the piano and you want one of the keys. I told this to another student, who commented, That's really derogatory. The problem is that they are not hearing me. They are just hearing the criticism. But all I was saying was, 'I don't understand this. Help me, let me hook in. (9/I: 101/2, Interview 2)

GEORGE

Field Record: [George's tutor was present during part of the group interview from which this excerpt comes] Tutor: Were the other students interested in what you had to say? George: No. IN WHAT WAYS WERE YOUR QUESTIONS RECEIVED. NOT EVEN MILDLY INTERESTED? They all looked at me as if to say, 'Who are you?' Like I was an alien or something. [The lectures in this department are not traditionally open to students from other departments] [...] George was asked by another student how he had felt in the lectures) I could answer all of the questions they were raising but it was a small room and all the _____ students were sitting around passively. 'Yawn' (He laughed). WEREN'T THEY INTERESTED IN YOUR EXPERIENCE? It was irrelevant. (I, 9: 229/6)

Darcy

Field Record: YOU MENTIONED TEACHING. LEARNING. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THESE WORDS. Darcy: Certainly not what is going on here (she laughed cynically) HOW SO? Learning for me equals excitement, curiosity. Even with mundane things. Even those can be stimulating to learn by looking at what is NOT obvious. Even they can involve you. (She became quiet) I am trying to think of an example. No, not yet... 'It is also to do with fun. There is not enough humour in teaching. A few lecturers here use it. One is a dream to be lectured to. He gives you everything to go off and do more. And he uses humour and fun. This is a big aid to learning. And it relaxes you also. Teaching is not about coming to a lecture room and reeling off a list of references in some order, or

presenting a stripped outline, or being defensive of critical questions or pretending. So many times (She launched into a new train of thought) in the lecture room, a lecturer will defend a point. But privately, say a different thing altogether. One to one, they will state their feelings and beliefs. This is dishonesty. I can't stand that. Teaching cannot be about that. There is nothing wrong about saying, 'Here is the syllabus. You must do that to get the qualification but here is what you should know. What we must think about. The questions we must ask. For example, there is one lecturer who is brilliant. He knows everything (She laughed) He was my lab teacher. I had to do three. I hated it. Once I had an argument with him and I started crying. because he just couldn't see what I was saying. It is so sad. [re ending up not having to do three labs...] I told him I was glad because '___ is a load of shit'. (She laughed) He was really shocked. He said, That's disturbing. I said, Either find methods which are appropriate [...] or stop altogether because these are meaningless. You keep on doing the same thing over and over again. To what end?? He stopped and said, I've felt that for two years. he then directed me towards a paper by ___, 1985. (She became very sober) He felt that too, what I was feeling. (She shook her head in disbelief) But he felt he had to keep up the pretense. And I thought, how sad. Brave man, [reference to this author who spoke about his own sense of disjunction between the expectations of him as a teacher in this academic subject area, and the experience of himself and his students). After 20 years, Brave man. [re how he totally reversed his thinking about the meaning and relevance of the subject area, and the choices for approaching it). (I, 9: 89/15)

CONNIE

Field Record: Connie: tutors need to remember that they too are mature students and to use that as a way of relating to mature students. They come with experience, how they see us affects how they interact. They must be helped to see that. 'If you're motivated you'll get it.' Your pressures are seen as a testing ground. For example, you'll be a good ___ [ie if you survive these] rather than realising the pressures you are under. I wouldn't want the structure and the knowledge to be changed. Just to have more time, and more emphasis on motivation. But sometimes, I just cannot cope. There must be a positive discrimination towards older people. Also, they must want to learn to write again. They don't accept it at face value. [...] ANY OTHER WAYS OF GETTING THE SUPPORT YOU NEED? Personally, no. [...] In student role, looking at knowledge, language, tension of that. But again, because they are the elite teaching their knowledge, they would find it detrimental. 'We are not there to guide you through.' I, 9: 022/31-2)

APPENDIX 43b

UNCONSTRUCTIVE JARRINGS
CONFLICTING MEANINGS FOR STANDARDSGodfrey, Janice and Bill

Field notes: Bill: You can usually tell the first year students on campus. Walk around smiling. Full of hope and expectations. Second year different. Third year tucked away working. Big shock in first year. Course I did before coming to university, technical course, not 'A' level standard. Had to work my butt off in the first year. But by second year, work rate should have gone up, but gone down. Because of disillusionment. Janice: I agree. My work rate has certainly gone down. Godfrey: I feel I haven't studied. Wasted my time here. People say, [Godfrey] you've done [professional training, a degree course and now a masters. Five years of study!] but I haven't studied for five years. Janice: Because structured? Masters different? I feel I've studied, but my work rate has gone down. Maybe you realise they've already decided what you're going to get. Why work to that standard? (I, 9: 84/18)

Ethel

Field notes: Ethel: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES HERE? I came in as a cynic and I am going out even more so. It's all about knowledge for knowledge's sake. Why stuff it into you when you can look it up in a book. They are playing intellectual pingpong with other people's ideas. Rather than creating, originating. My only original work on this course was my research. I loved that. [...] The only way I could fill my interests since I came here. I learned more from that than anything else. I visited lots of places but I had a limited time scale. In June. I identified my idea and went to my tutor. From June to March, I worked non stop. I wrote one essay. c+ average since I started here. It suited me because then no one bothers you. [...] People around me were aiming for firsts, upper seconds. People who drive me around the sodding twist. They're going around saying 'I must get a top degree' But the world won't stop spinning if I fail. But it may be different if you're here as a mature student. But one has cracked up, another left on the verge of a breakdown, another crashed a car into a lamppost. Not me mate. But my children want me to do it. They are 14, 12, 10. Bright children. (Sighed) But the 14 year old has seen an Ed psych already. ANY MOMENTS THAT MADE IT WORTH IT? The general culmination is that I haven't enjoyed it at all. It feels like an academic sausage machine. You are in or out of the System and if you are any way different, forget it. I can't fit into this. They are geared to the average anyway. if you don't believe and think their way (shrugged)...Half of it is pricelss, funny. Of course you don't fit in! (I, 9: 92/21)

Fran and Georgette

Field Record:: Georgette: First I went as a part time student and I was glad to get asked. It was my self motivation, so if I failed I could do it quietly. Slip out the back door. And then I got really enthusiastic. It was really exciting. A whole new world opened up. Lots of structured thinking, people who knew a lot more than I did and could provide me with the information and directions to get to the heart of the matter. I particularly liked philosophy and there were things I couldn't follow up and that was a disquiet not being able to select for myself the aspects that interested me and that I didn't like and another thing was a great disappointment was that when I came in with tremendous enthusiasm, it wasn't responded to at all, as usual. Fran: Yeah, that's the sort of feedback you've got all the way through if you tried to learn. Georgette: And I stopped asking questions in lectures and I decided I could take it further for me, but I limited my aims right down and saw it more and more as a starting point for my learning. I expect it to start now, that I am finishing this course. Fran: Just the beginning really. Georgette: Yeah, like jumping a hurdle, and I also want to apply it practically. And I did all the time. I didn't want to [...] spend three weeks looking at the abstracts. Like I went and did my project at [...] and that was good. SO THAT WAS AN OUTLET, LIKE YOU? (ACKNOWLEDGING ETHEL WHO WAS STILL QUIETLY LISTENING IN THE CORNER) Oh yeah, which is also a foundation for my working life. (I, 9: 284/34-5)

APPENDIX 43c

UNCONSTRUCTIVE JARRINGS
THE DECISION TO LEAVEPeter

Field recordThe whole thing was geared to certain standards, certain expectations and you weren't really supposed to rock the boat because there wasn't time to talk. You weren't encouraged to talk to lecturers at that point and it was almost as if the standards had come down and down and down to meet the behaviour of the students and I had expected some sort of discipline, to say you don't come back if you didn't work. Even if you were told to leave the college, this is not heavy handed or anything. It is perfectly understandable if you don't work and I started feeling quite strongly about all these tax payers money being wasted on these idle rich. I mean, it became more of a class thing to me, and I started to feel more of an identification with working class people I had been working with, living with and started to resent this middle class environment so it was sort of political [...] My image of students had changed from bearded intellectuals talking about philosophy to sweatshirts, denims and space invaders and it had really been a nasty shock and I didn't want anything to do with it. (IV, 9: 041/53-4)

PETER

Field recordI was appalled at how badly the system worked. It was a whole year of introduction where we learnt very very little which counted for nothing towards the diploma degree which I think was a waste of the whole year and in which you got no personal tuition, because they weren't interested in first years. Of course, if you had some extreme problem, you could go along but they were not interested really, and that was the thing that really stunned me. The lecturers just were not interested and I hadn't expected that, and we were in enormous groups. Some had sixty people in them. No way to learn. (IV, 9: 045/50)[...]I thought university was about, in a way, research from the beginning. You were on your own individual programme of research and people were there to help you and I was being told what to think and it really went against my grain and I couldn't deal with it. (IV, 9: 047/60)

Field record:...and it had really been a nasty shock and I didn't want anything to do with it and at the end of the year I had a talk with my tutor and said to her that I couldn't see that there was any point in regurgitating what you had learnt in lectures, with the minimum amount of reading we were expected to do, and if that is what university is going to be like, I don't want to go on and she said, no, no, don't worry. It will get better and I said if her exam paper was going to be like that, I wouldn't get through it because I hadn't done her work. I had deliberately rebelled and gone off to read things I was interested in in order to broaden my scope and SO YOU HAD CONTINUED YOUR READING THEN? Yes, but much more on my own again, with a little bit more

informed use of the library and the exam paper came along and there wasn't a single question on the paper that depended upon you having read and digested a passage of a book but THE WHOLE PAPER? [...]the last paper was ____, which I had decided I was going to do [as his subject area] and all these questions were based on having done just what you were told, just like at school, like if you had done your homework, you would pass this exam and that was the only way you could pass it, there was no general demand to see any sort of thoughts, insights, ability or anything. SO EVERYTHING WAS BASED ON LECTURES? Yes, and a very small amount of reading. Like they would give you a chapter by ____ to read and the lectures would be based on it anyway. So if you went to all the lectures and repeated that, you would pass. So I looked at this paper, and had had a bit to drink before I went in and I got up and walked out before the exam started and left university. [IV, 9: 042/55-6]

APPENDIX 44a

ISSUES OF POWER AND ROLE
A SENSE OF DISJUNCTION IN RELATION TO AGE

Janet:

Field Record: ARE THERE MANY MATURE STUDENTS? Janet: No, we are just a token. One token on one course, and one on another. We relax when were together. Other times, we can't let our hair down. We are all older, and have been through it, the things the 18 year olds talk about. HOW ABOUT SEMINARS? There is less of contributions because they don't know what they are talking about. But it feels relevant to me and I feel much brighter which is good. But their minds are not really, they are so naive. And they keep quiet lest they appear stupid. They don't say. And the tutor has learned not to bother. (VI, 9: 067/22-3)

Susan

Field Record: And the seminar groups. I sort of bounced into the first one quite happily and they were very strange and nobody really said anything or they would, but if you challenged them, they would leave it go, BOTH YOUR OWN PEERS AND YOUR TUTOR? IF YOU CHALLENGED? No, my peers. The tutor may ask a question and then let it go. He would try not to say anything throughout the entire session which could get very unnerving because you had these very long silences and not a lot finally happened. [...] HOW MANY OVER 21? All 18 except me. OH REALLY? YOU WERE THE ONLY MATURE STUDENT? And they were straight out of school and they were waiting for the teacher to tell them what was right and wrong and I used to launch into a , 'let me entertain you' and I would go and wind up and they would all agree with me and I would say it's a load of rubbish and they would go, 'Eh?!' But not to be malicious but somehow we had to get the thing going. If I shut up, it just died a death. (VII, 9: 187/6)

APPENDIX 44b

ISSUES OF POWER AND ROLE:
A SENSE OF DISJUNCTION IN RELATION TO AGE AND
GENDER

Vera:

Field Record: HOW ABOUT SOME OF THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT HAVE BEEN AROUND LEARNING FOR YOU? [...] In a group, I realise I have a lot of knowledge that youngsters don't. I find it difficult not to say anything but then it is not fair to them. [One tutor] gives a topic and leaves because he feels we discuss more when he's out. Hard to listen to them trying to make headway without saying something. They don't understand and I do. It is hard not to become a mother, a teacher. Plus they are my colleagues. I keep thinking about what do they want? Should you worry about this? When these things go through I think, just be natural. I need to put the responsibility on them. It is their problem. But this is hard. Later, when talking to others, I tell them. They say, at least you've thought about it. I try to be conscious about the space. It is not easy if you have a lot to say and you see them struggling. (VI, 9: 076/20) It makes you feel nervous, tentative. For example, it is a problem in seminars. I prefer to sit back and then talk, although I am fairly voluble. It is harder in a one to one to sort out how he feels. Does he like me. I get a bit churned up. Of course he doesn't have to like me. Just has to mark my work. But one lecturer, he likes to hear problems and play a fatherly role. I don't want to be in that position of him feeling powerful. Or of opening up my heart. But I wanted him to know I had problems without exposing myself or becoming vulnerable. Like a doctor. I once had eczema and this caused a great deal of stress. But I would rather not get into it. I just want to get the degree. (VI, 065/19)

Field notes: SO ANOTHER VALUE AROUND LEARNING THAT I AM HEARING IS THIS THING ABOUT THE PERSON, THE PERSON'S OWN DEVELOPMENT AND THE DIFFERENT SITUATIONS ABOUT LIFE AND HOW THEY ALL COME TOGETHER. Vera I think it's really hard to get them together sometimes. A friend of mine, who is a psychiatrist, he said to me once, I find each day I am so terribly tired and at the moment I have to be father to Angela and mother and father as well because they were living along way from [his wife's] parents and then you go to the office and you are someone's colleague and someone's boss and then patients, and this continuous ROLE CONFLICTS? Yes. all day long. And then you come home and must switch to being father, husband, mother, all at the same time because his wife wasn't very well at the time and was having problems with her family and I thought that's true of all of us. We are all doing this. You're not only someone's mother, but you're somebody's friend and those friends feel they have a claim on your time. Like my husband gets really upset on the weekends, when he thinks he has got Sunday afternoon and me together. And friends pop around because they haven't seen me for two weeks and I think, 'delighted' and say, 'yes' (VI, 9: 060/56) I feel that consciously, the whole conflicts with families causes problem with your studying. Harder to cut yourself off. I think

men find it easier to disassociate their responsibilities. If they have to study a report, they study it. But women have to work harder. At putting your personal problems out of your mind and concentrating on practical work or whatever. I think women also like that other women bring them where Hillcroft has a great value. They like mutual support. I think men are afraid of mutual support and I think they like it if they can get it but they don't know how to get it from each other and are more afraid of unburdening themselves. If my husband is any indication of the average male. THEY DON'T LIKE TO THINK ABOUT...No, they don't like to think about themselves. [My husband] once he has made a decision, that is that. He just sticks to it. Whereas I will agonise over the making of it and having made it, I will worry if it was the right decision to make and I don't think I am unusual in that point of view. (laughter) NO! (VI, 9: 061/59)

Connie

Field Record: Connie: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL TUTOR GROUP. IS THERE SCOPE FOR DIALOGUE THERE? No (pause) If I have to think that hard it must not exist. The tutor is outside the group. Putting in material to be talked about rather than putting in an idea to be jointly explored. Also, when they were worked out, the groups, there was not enough emphasis on the different types of people on the course. You must make sure you don't become a downer. Get into a mother child role. You must let them learn. Also, one black person and all the rest white. Not enough black people. (I, 9: 068/22)[...] Themes such as the skill and role of the tutor in group based learning, age and gender combine with the active-passive dimension for Alex. REFLECTING BACK NOW. HOW WELL HAVE YOUR EXPECTATIONS BEEN MET? The teaching style hasn't. Not the men at least. And the other younger students. Don't feel able to contribute. I chat and if others don't, I feel I'm taking over. I look to give them chances but they don't take it. The younger ones that is. The best discussion was always from the mature students. (I, 9: 075/10) WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO THAT 'FEELING DRAINED' OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS? Connie: This place says it takes note of mature students. But it doesn't. The tutors feel that they are gods with all the knowledge. Students are all on a par. You don't feel like you're contributing. Not like FE. I expected it to be the same amount of work, but with children, home. They keep saying, 'If you're motivated, you'll do it.' Age makes no difference to them. (I, 9: 049/20) WAS THE SPLITTING AN ISSUE FOR YOU IN FE? Less so. Family was more separate. I actually prefer to play two roles. A student role here and another at home. For people at college, home (and study) usually don't meet. It is a conscious decision. You meet them here for different reasons. Two social groups. In my role at home, I feel that I'm a whole me. I see all aspects of me. When I speak it's a whole me. I feel integrated in my views and my feelings. Here, because of the split and the way you fit into the role of the student, I am still trying to learn. There are specific assumptions about appropriate behaviour because they are not geared to mature students. This increases the role splitting. (I, 9: 062/25) IT SOUNDS AS IF YOU ARE STILL TRYING TO 'LEARN' THE ROLE OF STUDENT? No, I have given up. I have made a conscious effort to separate because of my past experience of dealing with all the tensions and conflicts at home. It doesn't

actually work because I have to take her (*referring to self*) home! But during the first year I felt it acutely. (I, 9: 051/26) HOW ABOUT WOMEN'S ISSUES. DO YOU FEEL ABLE TO EXPLORE THOSE? Yes, you are able to use your experience in that respect, you can adapt to the essays. but it is easier to relate to women. With men, they become the teacher. They have never experienced what we have. IF YOU'RE OUTRAGED CAN YOU SAY (reference to earlier comment) Depends on the tutor. Some yes, and this leads to a useful debate. Others just ignore you. It doesn't meet their views and then you get angry. I have noticed this more this year that some lecturers are bringing out issues but this is then misinterpreted by students, seen as an insult. Now, I just put my hand over my face. Lecturers are bear biting again! If I do join in, I restate what he's said, and identify where he's coming from just to reduce the tension. (I, 9: 056/30)

Janice

Field notes: YOU MENTIONED EARLIER THAT YOU FELT THAT LEARNING INSIDE AND LIFE OUTSIDE FELT SEPARATE. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THAT? Janice: I have always felt like I'm leading two lives. Like I'm not a true student. (She laughed) I mean, a 'true student' goes home to their pad and studies and spends time in the student union. Now it's exams inside and the child outside. Especially now. They tend to forget I have another life. In fact, I feel on the defensive all the time. 'I've got two lives' , I want to say. 'What about the rest of me? You're not really assessing me

Diane

Field record: Diane: I TOLD HER THE JOKE SOMEONE HAD TOLD THE OTHER DAY ABOUT A STUDENT WHO SAID SHE WAS GOING TO BE A LITTLE LATE WITH HER ESSAY AND THE TUTOR GOT ALL UP TIGHT. BUT WHAT HE DIDN'T KNOW IS THAT THAT WEEK HER CHILD HAD GONE INTO HOSPITAL AND HER HUSBAND ASKED HER FOR A DIVORCE! Diane: That reminds me of a similar thing that happened to me. One week I smashed my car up. I went to one of the lecturers and he said, 'How are you?' 'Do you need a certificate?' 'Need to shed a few tears?' Really sympathetic. Versus another lecturer. Who once, when I had to take my son to this real Doctor bastard who patronised me - I was trying to talk about it because my son had this bad skin rash. But he showed no sympathy. But such individual differences in the same department! (I, 9: 204/13)

Sally

Field record: I hate this whole thing of competitiveness. The male thing again. Like the other day, we had a seminar and we had taken this blessed exam and the tutor said he had the results and there was this big thing played up and we were going to get these results and I had forgotten we had even done the blessed thing, and we were in the tutorial, three of us, and the younger ones tend to ask you to do things if you are a mature student and she kept saying, 'Ask him for the results. Ask him and so I asked him and he said, 'Now do you mind if I read them amongst each other?' 'I don't give a damn. ' 'Would you like them on your own?' He looked at the girl next to me and said,

'Ah, well you are all going to hate cleverboots here, and we said, who do you mean and he looked at her and we said, 'Why?' 'Well, she managed to get 72 percent' and as it turned out, the other girl got 50 and I got 48, the lowest! I was so angry by this, all this emphasis on competition. 'Have you got more marks than the next person' and I thought, 'How pathetic'. To me, it is just pathetic. SO THAT BROUGHT BACK HOME...Hm, I THINK YOU ALSO SPOKE ABOUT THAT, THE COMPETITION, AND YOU LOATHED THE NOISE AND ALL (of her secondary school) Yes, it takes me BACK. Yes, it's noisy, and full of tramped corridors and plastic cups and all, whereas it was quite civilised here [Hillcroft/ THE GRUBBY CUPS? Yes, grubby plastic cups lurking in corners. You find them and take them to lectures and re-use them. Just like school. Only thing is it used to be cabbage stuck in the desk. (VII. 9: 163/14-15)

Alex

Field record: Alex: REFLECTING BACK NOW. HOW WELL HAVE YOUR EXPECTATIONS BEEN MET? The teaching style hasn't. Not the men at least. And the other younger students don't feel able to contribute. I chat, and if others don't, I feel I'm taking over. I look to give them chances but they don't take it. The younger ones that is. The best discussion was always from the mature students. As far as teaching style goes, there has not been much chance to have discussion groups. But the confidence has worked for me quite a lot. Not so much because of being here but because of being out of nursing. I made a distinct move to change it, my life, and that has taken guts. As far as achievement, I haven't achieved as much as much as I could have. That's my fault for not trying hard enough. My old pattern. If I try hard and fail it's because of me. My fault. If I don't try, I say I could have done it. (I, 7: 075/10)

APPENDIX 44c

ISSUES OF POWER AND ROLE
A SENSE OF DISJUNCTION IN RELATION TO
CLASS AND AGE

Peter

Field Record: WERE THERE OTHER MATURE STUDENTS? Yes, there were quite a lot of mature students in the first year in that department but I didn't get to know any of them during this first year. I was living in a Hall, and on the whole they didn't. I[...] I moved out after the first year but mostly I was with kids who had just left school and I felt a lot older than them. [...] But I had been living away from home since I was 13 which was a major difference and what most of the fellow public school boys I met there were really public school prats and doing business, law, engineering so they could go on to well paid jobs which nearly everybody there was doing. Qualifying themselves for a guaranteed soft future and very career minded, painfully middle class ambitious, conformist and debates in the student union used to be painfully complacent and I had certainly been thinking it would be beyond me. And more painfully radical! But just complacent and they were so childish. I had a really hard time with kids letting off fire extinguishers in the corridors...] But this really surprised me because I expected loads of intellectual people sitting around talking about important things and here they were throwing flans in each other's faces and it was all too much AND ALSO A BIG DECISION TO GO BACK. Yes, it had been[...] I started feeling quite strongly about all these tax payers' money being wasted on these idle rich. I mean, it became more of a class thing to me and I started to feel more of an identification with working class people I had ben working with, living with, and started to resent this middle class environment so it was sort of political and I started to move a bit left in my opinions although not very coherently at the time[...] I spent all my time going out in London trying not to be a student because my image of students had changed from bearded intellectuals talking about philosophy to sweatshirts, denims and space invaders and it had really been a nasty shock and I didn't want anything to do with it. " (IV, 9: 041/51-3)

Kath, Kim, Laurence

Field record: WITH REGARD TO CLASS, TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOURSELVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AS OPPOSED TO OUTSIDE HIGHER EDUCATION (*They had all self-identified as working class*)

Kim: I had internalised the idea that I would not be accepted. My confidence was low. This course has increased my confidence. On the outside, I was constantly put down. 'What would you know?' I felt it wasn't so, but I was told that over and over again.

Laurence: Me too! Two people feeling the same thing?! Hmm (to me) Something in that, maybe? Because higher education for me, I have had to learn a new language. Dictionary words, ways of using words.

Kath: And the jargon of the course (General laughter, smiles of agreement)

Laurence: So the tools of knowledge as deliberately made special so people cannot get access to them.

Kath: It's a definite handicap

Laurence: I came to higher education to gain confidence. I call it the 'Wizard of Oz Syndrome'. You are getting your diploma because other people keep telling you you haven't a brain. I was determined that I must get that piece of paper. There is a lot in that. That pressure to get the degree.

Kath: It also tends to cut you off somewhat from life outside. Education is obsessive. 'Life begins afterwards' Really obsessive. in fact, you must retreat from life to get through. You cannot participate because of the pressure on you.

L: And you feel cloistered. An 'us and them' feeling.

K and K, in unison: And you can't get a job! (laughter)

Reflection: I didn't quite understand this interjection but the pace of the conversation was such that it was all I could do to keep up recording it. And encouraging nonverbally. But they were talking to each other as much as me. There was a genuine involvement in exploring the issues that went beyond any purposes of an interview. A self involvement that was exciting. The profile of the lifelong learner?

kath: But there is that element of 'this and them' and of getting that degree.

Kim: It is also constructed into a competitive activity. It's not voluntary. You're forced to accept society's judgement. Fucking hell, we will be devastated if we don't get it (*General nods of agreement all around*)

YOU'LL BE DEVASTATED IF YOU DON'T GET IT...

Kath: Yes, the system defines you. It's an overriding pressure. If I don't get it, I will feel a failure and I will not value myself. It's the weight of society. Not just your own opinion of yourself.

Kim: It's all that bloody value put on that piece of paper.

Laurence: Actually I started the course for myself. But now it is hard to admit, it is hard to admit that this is there. That need for that piece of paper.

kath: And you get rewards. For example, I am now getting a positive response from [my son's] teachers at school...Now that I am doing a degree they listen to me.

Laurence: let's face it, it gives you kudos.

Kath: Now that I'm middle class, now they take my son seriously. But when [her son] was a baby, the health visitor, who was middle class, and everyone else, the attitudes put you down. Think you're irresponsible., But I've gained a new respect.

HAVE YOU FELT, DURING THIS LEARNING PROCESS HERE, THAT YOU ARE 'ONE SELF'?

Kath: I find it difficult to communicate to others. I've moved away from them.

Kim: Even with people not doing our course, but on other courses. I'd tell them some of the ideas I'd gained from this course and they jump down my throat. They think I'm being better than them. I wonder, is this the result of my being working class?

Ethel

Field record: Ethel: Mostly middle class males here. A few women with families. But they don't have a clue what you are talking about. For example, I couldn't do an essay once. I had two kids with flu. Tutors acted as if you could wrap them up, stick them in a drawer , do your essay, dig them out when you have finished. It's not their fault. But it is very frustrating. They just want to pat you on the head, give you a lump of sugar and send you away. They expect you to perform at the level of an 18 year old but you have other things on your mind. Or treated like ____ (unclear). For example, with your work. They think you are like an 18 year old who has been out drinking. Just like the school system. Like the teachers there (reference early school) Who thought that the authority of the teacher makes them god's gift. You are just a grotty little kid they have to put their pearls of wisdom into. But the kid just wants to give them the finger. Same mentality here. (I, 9: 135/4)

APPENDIX 44d

ISSUES OF POWER AND ROLE
A SENSE OF DISJUNCTION IN RELATION TO
MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Diane

FIELD RECORD: Diane: YOU MENTIONED AT OUR LAST INTERVIEW THAT YOU HADN'T SPOKEN ABOUT BEING A WOMAN ON THIS COURSE. I realised how I've used being a woman to get things done here, e.g. with the technicians. I ASKED HER IF SHE COULD CLARIFY I've used my sex appeal. I'll admit, and I've been aware I'm using it. I don't like it but I needed to. HOW ABOUT AS A WOMAN IN RELATION TO THE COURSE MATERIAL ITSELF? I've learned how books are slanted to the masculine side. I was brought up as if it were automatic. But a woman lecturer helped me to open my eyes to that. Also to the use of language. But for example, how we defer to men in the room or how women listen more if men are in the room. I ASKED ABOUT A PARTICULAR TUTOR WHO WAS AN ACTIVE FEMINIST? She's a funny woman. She gives over these views about men and women but she doesn't always carry that through with female students. I ASKED HER IF SHE COULD ELABORATE WITH EXAMPLES. It's not just about standing up for yourself as a woman and letting me develop. We also have other women to stand up against. We are fighting against them too. Their boundaries. it's not just me. It's the whole female background. For example, [she once, in speaking about another woman] commented with disdain, "She even washed his shirts" I thought, what a stupid example. For example, in ordinary working class background, you do all the washing at once. HOW DO YOU FEEL AT TIMES LIKE THAT? Anger is too strong a word, but its around because the situation smacks a bit of the do-gooder. She's trying to help. It's not necessary to experience everywhere you can help, but if you haven't even picked up that sensitivity to people's background...Yes, a lack of awareness and it poses a conflict for me. 'Be scientific. ' 'An experimental establishment'. Experimental equals proving things. There's understanding for so long, but then they slip back into hypothesising, being 'scientific'. (I, 9: 1/4-5, Interview 2) HOW ABOUT WITH RESPECT TO CLASS? This doesn't matter as much because there are more working class students. HOW ABOUT THE LECTURERS? The problem is, many go straight from school to college, and into teaching with no experience of real life. For me, that is the main problem. There is no understanding through experience. So the middle class view is put forward as 'the view'. For example, a female lecturer was married to another lecturer. She had two kids. Someone once said how difficult it was to cope with a family, and she said, 'Well I did it. ' She forgets that she had domestic help and no shortage of money. There is no answer, but that can come between you trying to share your problems in trying to cope. (I, 09: 4/11, Interview 2)

SUSAN

Field Record:HAS IT BEEN A BARRIER SINCE RETURNING? [re class and learning referred to in earlier statements about initial schooling] Yes. I thought I'd got over it. The chip on my shoulder. Thought it had gone till here and I realised it was all to do with accent. I switched off, because I was more open to a working class accent. I didn't realise it till I was talking with a middle class friend and I realised how that had blocked. Now I guess I must seem more middle class but I am working class. I wouldn't like to think it is gone. But I couldn't guarantee it wouldn't. Sex? That has almost disappeared. Boys learning, girls learning. The secretary bit is gone. But I still feel guilt that I should be doing computing rather than history! (V, 9: 142/16)

Field Record:And I went back the second term with the intention of doing that [lowering her expectations] and it was even worse. To the point where I was thinking in some ways. THE FEELING WAS WORSE? The seminar group was actually better in lots of ways. IN WHAT WAY. Like people would actually speak, a couple of them were prepared to open their mouths, argue, discuss the issues and we would get some very lively ones and a lot of what they came out with absolutely filled me with horror and this was horrendous and this was also meanwhile going on on the social side. I live in a house [with a lot of third year students where one person] is a quasi fascist. I don't use that term lightly and I am constantly hearing these cracks like, 'Apartheid is better than communism'and then one came out with this incredible thing that women shouldn't have jobs that take a lot of training because they go off and have babies and they believe this AND THIS IS IN THE THIRD YEAR? Yeah. (VII, 9: 186/12-13)

Field Record:I think their role is to arbitrate. The point being, they want the students to think for themselves, to be convinced by themselves and come down and say, 'This is' and one of these was an incredible wind up merchant and what the hell it enlivened the sessions but a couple in there really felt that... [shook her head] and talking to the tutor afterwards, was unbelievable. He said he finds it a very depressing trend over the years, seen them move further and further to the right but incredibly naive and he had been interviewing that afternoon and there was not one application from a comprehensive. All from private schools in the southeast. And he never, what he actually said, he never thought he would end up in a finishing school, so that is a particular problem. I find that very difficult. (VII, 9: 186/12)

NANCY

Field Record:The lecturers said, we are not concerned with where you come from, your background, you are here because you want to be and you will be treated the same, and it was quite interesting to find out. All these people had different experiences, and how they could bring them in and use them together which I thought was good. And it was true. THEY LIVED UP TO THAT? Yeah. Very fair on everyone. Good course. And their attitudes were good. SAY WHAT YOU MEAN BY THAT.

Positive by saying that no prejudice against anybody. Majority were women, about 8 men and rest women and they said it always happens that way. HOW ABOUT LECTURERS? Majority men. Which was a bit funny. I suppose.[...] HOW WAS THAT. YOU SAID 'A BIT FUNNY'? That they are teaching mostly women and most are men and the only women were on the ___ side. One woman on ___ but the majority , most of them were male. HOW DID YOU FIND THAT IN TERMS OF DIFFERENCES FROM HERE. I knew it was going to be mixed. YEAH, YOU MENTIONED THAT LATER [IN THE TRANSCRIPT] I wondered how it would be but it didnt make any difference. I , you know, I like to go for personalities of people rather than what sex, and people knew I didn't like them straight from the beginning but only because of the way they were speaking, their attitudes. (VII, 9: 76/45)

Godfrey and Janice

Field notes:Godfrey: When I am challenged and criticised by anyone, I feel every part of me is learning. I learn more when I am placed on the spot. When cornered for example on a platform, giving a speech. I am all angry and aggressive when I'm at my height. If I'm in a group of people and everyone's against me, I learn most. When I must challenge myself, and assimilate what I've learned. Give different interpretations to things. Why I enjoy people not agreeing with me. Find it beneficial, useful. DOES IT MATTER WHO THE PERSON IS? I never feel comfortable in a room full of whites. Never relaxed. Always on guard. Automatic. Immune to it. Unconscious. I speak in a particular manner. More passive in the way I present myself. Not me if in a group of black people. (changed body posture, language, phrasing and went into different role)'Whaaa...' (Laughed) More relaxed. It's me. Can curse, do anything. Like when you're angry, revert to your past experience. To learn fully, to be total, must be amongst black people. Janice: Certainly think you have to be on guard when you are with them. Depends on position, authority. Position. Must think of that. Must infringe on you as a person, depending on group you are in. (I, 9: 231, 21) [...] Godfrey: I need respect in my environment for me to learn. Plus stable psychology! Janice: I feel much more relaxed with a black community group. Because there, constantly raising other people's consciousness. Godfrey: Also, at these times, when black people challenge you with something. But if they challenge you, that is your view and this is my view. Just leave it. NO drive, no push, no encouragement to continue ongoing dialogue. With group of black people, if someone says, Black people are inferior to white, you will argue, say, 'No, no, no'. but in terms of their point of view, will read about it to see where they are coming from. But if white person, will ignore it. (I,9: 133/23)

Bill

Field Record:What I've learned about higher education. e.g. ___, [university] miles from anywhere. and I am the only black person. How I see the boundaries? Defined by them, stipulated by them, implemented by them and you are just there to respond. They see themselves as a processing machine. You are here to be processed. And if you have the ability to challenge that, you're like a fly. They have the ability to

'squash' you. (I, 9: 129/13) As a mature student, they expect you to do more because you've experienced life. Me, I don't think I have achieved my full potential. I have been unhappy. I started for a piece of paper. I go here and there, and get that job. But I wonder if its worth it. So much hassle. HASSLE...HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH IT? I keep to myself. I spend as little time as possible on campus. I only talk to my two friends from Birmingham doing the same course. Only nine students. Only way I deal with it. Don't intermingle. Feel strange, alienated. Plus students have a partiucular attitude. Radical, decadent. But I don't look on life as that. I go to lecturers, leave. Go back to my place and do my own thing. (O. 9: 85/16)

Shanti and Julien

Field Record:Shanti: You end up feeling so fragmented. I really feel fed up. There's no point in opening it up, is there? It won't make any difference since you'll never be able to say what you truly feel. Julien: Its like they're playing with us. All a game. (I, 9: 224/20) [...] Shanti (had been listening to Rama and Julien talking about 'boundaries, contradictions) I get so angry at their discourse. For example, this was supposed to be an educational conference. It will be 'all great'. 'Mixed'. 'We will try not to be teachers. 'Will engage in explicit examination of curriculum, teaching methods, question our roles', etc. But when you get down to practice, it's all about essays and grades and their using the terminology which is validated by the CNAA regulations. Rama: Are these necessarily incompatible? Shanti:At least here it's a bit more integrated and communal. I prefer it here. (comparing to previous education) (I, 9: 95/25)

APPENDIX 45

ON LEGITIMATE AND ILLEGITIMATE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE

Fran

Field Record: HOW ABOUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE? YOU SAID EARLIER, THEY DON'T LISTEN TO YOUR ANECDOTAL KNOWLEDGE. WHAT DOES KNOWLEDGE MEAN TO YOU AND WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY IN A FORMAL SYSTEM? I used to think that, probably would do after my experience, that all that I acquired was knowledge, so whether I learnt how to put a hairpin in, or how to write an essay, that was all knowledge and that all went up to make me. When I got onto this course, a) they don't want to know about what you've done before and b) they don't want anything anecdotal. All they want to do is teach you. What they do is compartmentalise their information to such an extent, what I always feel. (I, 9: 86/13)

Connie

Field record: Connie: They see themselves as the one to teach. They neglect what people are offering. They have this, 'vast amount of knowledge to pass over' times a specific amount and you are meant to revise and spill it out. They take into account what you're saying but then they translate it. They see that as part of teaching but it can reject the mature student. One particular tutor talks rubbish, using an elaborated language. All he is saying is, 'the cat sat on the mat'. But he spends 10 minutes saying nothing. It just makes you frustrated. CAN YOU NOT SAY? ASK FOR CLARIFICATION? All you get is another version. You keep thinking, 'Is it me?'. But confirmation from the group says it's him. You just follow the group norm and everyone sits there blank. It is the easier way out. (I, 9: 080/29)

Field record: Language, Knowledge. Here one has one's own language. Must adopt it to express your own experiences. I have felt very frustrated with that. Certain terms must be used to describe what you are feeling. "I know what you mean. I know what I want to say, but I must use your language. *(as if she were speaking to a tutor)* I don't really want to be a part of that. (...) to remain elite, [this subject] adopts a language with rules and barriers for relating our experience. Students can talk 2-3 minutes in another language. Like robots. Machines rather than as person. You bring your own experiences in but then they are translated and fed back to you. This is the way of teaching but it is also a put down. You have a choice. You either take up the language or reject it. (I, 9: 081/27)

Diane

Field record: "Surely this isn't [what you've been talking about]" And he just said to me, "You better go look these things up at the library". *(She spoke of her frustration)*: How can you talk about a part of a person with no reference to real life. More and more students keep saying that and a bit more openly." (I, 9: 228/16)

Bill

Field notes: I don't feel I have learned anything since coming to university. Techniques how to pass exams. Learned theory totally unrelated to the practical world. Useless. Course before was more practical. Felt good in that. I was learning plus living at home, so amongst my own friends. Felt comfortable. In ____, learning is on the theoretical side. Not really being able to bring it together with anything practical. Haven't actually assimilated it. Need practical to learn my kind of core. (I, 9: 88/22)

Susan

Field Record: HAS IT BEEN A BARRIER SINCE RETURNING? [re class and learning referred to in earlier statements about initial schooling] Yes. I thought I'd got over it. The chip on my shoulder. Thought it had gone till here and I realised it was all to do with accent. I switched off, because I was more open to a working class accent. I didn't realise it till I was talking with a middle class friend and I realised how that had blocked. Now I guess I must seem more middle class but I am working class. I wouldn't like to think it is gone. But I couldn't guarantee it wouldn't. Sex? That has almost disappeared. Boys' learning, girls' learning. The secretary bit is gone. But I still feel guilt that I should be doing computing rather than history! (V, 9: 142/16)

Field record: I dislike intellectualising about certain things. EXAMPLES? AND WHAT THAT FEELS LIKE? Possibly it is a sort of inverted snobbery. I have always disliked it. Switching the t.v. on and getting some guy from public school, university, sitting there, 'What the working class need...'. Don't tell me what I need. (*said with great emotion*) Possibly this is snobbery but it, their intentions may be good but I don't like that sort of intellectualising....Last term, studied Thompson's Making of the Working Class. Excellent book. Has come under fire from a lot of critics, but we've got it here again. A public school boy who went onto university and became an academic and his sympathy is sincere. Great book, needed to be done, more history should be written with empathy. He is not as clinically detached as most academics which I think is positive. THE LACK OF yeah, yeah, but something jars with him. On the one hand, this is certain, he romanticises a certain section. That section that are trying for middle class values: sober, clean, tidy, educate themselves. The rest he almost discounts. So he is still using middle class values to define what is and what isn't a good about the working class and that jars. I mean, at one point, during that seminar, we got into literacy and I pointed out, Thompson again, he is talking about Weaver Poets, they were cultured, they used to write poetry and he full of admiration for these and puts a bit of poetry in, but can't resist saying, 'But absolutely dreadful poetry'. So still sneering, even while he is saying, 'This is good'. And another piece in there, someone gets information, there is a letter he uses from a spy. but the way he chooses to do it is by pointing out how the guy is illiterate and it is disgusting, snivelling. But he is self-educated. The style that any working class person would have used to a social

superior and this is what he is discounting it on and all these contradictions all the way through [that] he apparently can't see. I brought this out in the session. The tutor did, but the others couldn't and we talked about literacy [...] But what I kept trying to get across, literacy is equated with education. Which of itself, I don't think is terribly valid. If you are looking at formal education, then yes. But education tends to be linked so often with intelligence. They therefore come out with this equation that if you are illiterate you are unintelligent. You are stupid. And this is something I bitterly bitterly resent. AS OPPOSED TO LACK OF OPPORTUNITY OR ALL SORTS OF THINGS Yeah, like maybe they can't read or write too well but they have a shrewd brain. (...)Like my father, my husband was dyslexic. and he didn't know he was until I told him. Perfectly obvious to me that this was the problem. Same thing. Absolute torment at school. Flung out because humiliation became such he couldn't take it. He was an engineer. Unqualified, damn good at the job but he couldn't get the qualifications because he had dyslexia. Always trying to prove more and go in at the bottom and so something I actually feel very strongly. I almost got on my soap box during the seminar, in fact I did, and said, leaving this university with a piece of paper proves nothing except that you have got the staying power to come in and write these essays. Writing these essays proves nothing. it doesn't prove you are educated in certain respects, yeah. But what about all the knowledge everybody else has. SO WHAT WERE SOME OF THE REACTIONS TO THIS. HOW WAS THE TUTOR REACTING. YOU ARE THE ONLY WORKING CLASS, ONLY WOMAN? Not only working class there [...] I felt that there was an age thing. Possibly more than anything else. [*accounting for the passive reaction to her 'soap box'*] I don't know. SO THEY WEREN'T USING THEIR EXPERIENCE? maybe they didn't have it. USING IT? Similar learned to look to the tutor. How easy it is not to use that experience. He was quite uncomfortable, and was quite happy to acknowledge what I said but it made him uncomfortable I think and then talking, it developed because I had almost become angry which I don't often do in that situation and I think [laughter] that came out as, but later, he during a conversation, something came up about adult literacy and WITH THE TUTOR? With the group. [He said] 'Possibly [Susan] knows more about this than I do which was actually quite gratifying. Which is not really true. I can only talk from my experience. BUT HE WAS VALUING THAT QUITE ACTIVELY. yeah, very definitely. But I think it is quite easy to do. Because there is almost this white male, middle class guilt. it's quite easy to push them into a position of feeling guilty, which you like, which is not what I am trying to do and it is very easy to do that. (VII, 9: 169/27-8)

KAREN

Field record: In all subjects, the fact that you're a woman reading books written by a man. The working class, yes, there are some areas where people are completely ignorant about , if middle class or even female working class. The prospects, and also differences, the North and South. Can be completely ignorant. THE CULTURE THEN ALSO? ...WERE YOU ABLE TO BRING IN THAT PERSPECTIVE? Can bring it in, but don't use it. But can share it. For example { } came from Yorkshire. He was

talking about kids on the street in clogs and 'flags' (*flagstones*) People down here couldn't imagine what he was talking about. Well this was my childhood. Certain sections of the women here in my eyes are middle class. They are just totally unaware. They don't disregard it, but regard it as an area which is completely 'no go'. BUT IT DOESN'T INHIBIT YOU? No, feel I can translate. Contribute. I think it did when I was younger, but not now.

Andrea

Field record HAS THERE BEEN ANYTHING ABOUT BEING A WOMAN OR BEING A PARENT THAT HAS JARRED IN THE SAME WAY IN THE COURSE? No, our course is mostly women anyway. I MEANT MORE IN TERMS OF FACTS YOU WANTED TO EXPLORE FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE? The only thing that has grated really is these feminsits who argue over little points and then I can't be bothered. Even the male tutors are very feminist minded at the poly. As you say, it all comes back to sociology, and you imagine that the working classes are something out of a zoo and going to work with their wooden clogs and their shawls and are oppressed and women are always being put in this category as well. yes, we have had very interesting discussions in lots of groups. Politics, etc about women's place and I don't think I would dare say I am glad I was a wife and mother for 20 years. WHY IS THAT? They really would think that I was mindless. In fact, I ws drawn one day to say has it ever crossed your mind that there are some women who want to bring up their own children. They are all for, Why aren't there women in politics. SO IT SOUNDS LIKE A VALUE CLASH AROUND THOSE AREAS. Yes, and they don't even consider that women may want to bring up their children...and you watch every word you say, something about bringing up your children. 'What do you mean!' You have to watch every word and what you mean by it (nervous laughter) THAT IS LECTURERS AS WELL AS STUDENTS? Oh yes, I think it comes down the other way. VI, 9: 066/40)

Janice

Field Record: ANY TIMES WHEN YOU FEEL CONFLICTED PERSONALLY? Yes! Like in the second year, we were learning about education and black people. Looking at the Scanlon Report. Having a lecture. He was talking about it, trying to address himself to rights, but he started with the position of black people in this country. Tracing history, but in a derogatory way. One of the lecturers said, I can understand that. I live in an area where black people live. They muck about in the streets. Can't speak English. I responded by doing an essay on Language and Dialect. Black people have their own language, This is devalued. Heard lots of times. I got the impression that we're talking about people 'out there' and not 'in here'. As if to imply, you don't fit in with people out there. But you do! The second year, I was having problems structuring essays. Lots of us being told you're having troubles. All the time you found yourself in conflict with lots of these things. . Plus realising your position. You're talking to people who seem semi-liberated and who give you books within which to locate yourself but talking about yourself as if you're not there. This became an important form of learning for me. Made you aware of the hurdles you have to go through. As a black person. Realising that

you have to do better than white person all the time. Pressure. At the end of the day, you will end up similar to the white person, whether they took it easy or not. These sorts of things make you quite resentful. In my placement, I chose an essay about particularly black people, because I knew how threatening that was for white people. No matter how many books they read, you are not in a position to bypass until you can do what you want to do. Because at the end of the day, you want to pass and you don't want to create too many problems. Something I denied. We're not supposed to be having that problem. Like the African students. They are seen to be stupid. But I read their work. The grammatical work is excellent. But other people are blocked. Colour and accent lower expectations. or they get patronising. Say, 'It's all right really. Because it's you, but never say why it's all right. At the end of the day, you are given one message. But why if it's all right did I get this mark?? (I, 9: 126/3)

APPENDIX 46

EXPLORING AND EXPRESSING KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWING

Vera

Field notes: Vera: It's all about that, you feel as if you are walking a tightrope. Like appearing to be confident, as I do sometimes, but feeling like jelly inside. Most of the time I feel like that. I wish I could do it. Sometimes I think I am just pretending to do it. AND IF AT THAT POINT SOMEBODY JUDGES YOU. It's disastrous isn't it. Unless they judge you right, like well done for your participation or something. I remember once in a meeting here (at Hillcroft) it was getting quite heated. College issues. I WENT TO ONE OF THOSE. all of a sudden I wanted to say something and stood up and said what I wanted and THIS WAS EARLY ON About term two, I think. And afterwards, several people said that what I said was just right and that was great. I felt good that they said 'good' to me because if people had ignored what I said afterwards, it would destroy my confidence for doing anything later. [...] What was good here, people would say, 'Well done'. Not just your lecturers, but your colleagues. Which you don't get so much at the poly. The students, the kids, still think they are in competition with you, like they are for adults, and they are really worried if you have better marks than them and I find that very negative and I try to talk them out of thinking it matters if they have more or less than someone else because that is not entirely relevant to being at the poly. Like I got two very good marks for two early pieces of work and one girl didn't and was upset at her low marks. I said, you are lucky, you didn't get high. You can gradually improve. I now have to fight like mad to keep up there! and disappoint myself which is bound to happen because there is no way to do the same. At least you have the opportunity. I mean, we are not in competition with each other. (VI, 9: 020/43-4)

Alex

Field record: Alex: Both sides of the story are not given. You must read what they say and mustn't learn the other side because you'll get penalised. They must hear their version. (*She asked me to read back her previous list again*). They forget that people may find it difficult. But if I question, they give me a hard time. They make me feel that I have to justify, defend what I say rather than exploring together. That gets me angry inside. And then I tend to lay off. I should be able to say, 'This stuff is rubbish'. But you have to know all there is that you must know about that to say anything about it! Also, personal knowledge is what I like to hear. Their experiences. The rest I can read in a book. (I, 079/13)

Fran

Field notes: Fran: But how you teach is by connecting the bits. Most people learn bits and pieces and we've come now for us, to learn, and we have had so many weeks of collecting all the separate lectures we

have had and we have [...] just connected everything together. (I, 9: 205/39)

Diane

Field record: Diane: It's an ongoing conflict I have with the lecturers. For example, there was a talk last Friday with the third years and one of the lecturers. We asked, what happens to the conflict between one point of view and another point of view amongst lecturers? He said, 'I know no one in this building who has this conflict. And he goes and gets on his high horse. He puts you down in this sarcastic post manner. They expound publicly, but in their cubby holes, they must say I don't believe all I say. It's the internal and external conflict of lecturers. 'Not true' ((said with disbelief) I know of no one who doesn't feel that conflict. Not all knowlege is scientific. So how do they resolve the conflict??(I, 9: 75/2/6)

Field notes: Diane: I remember a time when I was a [this lecture]. It was done sequentially rather than structured around particular questions. Very complex. I asked the lecturer, 'Is there anything you could do to make this simple?' '[Diane], he said, 'I am giving you the piano and you want one of the keys. ' I told this to another student who commented, 'That's really derogatory'. The problem is that they are not hearing me. They are just hearing the criticism. But all I was saying was, 'I don't understand. Help me, let me hook in. ' what I find poisonous in education are the derogatory remarks because all I could say was, 'Yeah ___, that's your stuff. I'll go work it out for myself. It would have stopped me when I was younger. But now I just say, 'O.K., I've made a fool out of myself. It's o.k. for me. But [Darcy] calls it their 'intellectual masturbation'. (I, 9: 101/2)

Field record: *I've been operating on the feeling side and I am trying for a balance between the masculine and feminine parts of myself. My feeling side is well honed. (She laughed, bemused) Maybe one day I will find why I am doing [a science based course]. (I asked her to elaborate on her training/work as a counsellor in relation to her experience of being a student) During the first year, there was a great separation. Two extreme environments. During the second year, I felt a bit better. I asked why Because I felt I would not be taken away from what I had. in the second year, I knew I wasn't going to lose that. (OI, 9: 220/20)*

Field record(I ASKED HER TO TALK A BIT MORE ABOUT 'MASCULINE_FEMININE' DISTINCTIONS SHE HAD MADE) Well I guess I see maculine as 'intellectual analytical'. But (she became excited) I am learning there are different ways of thinking. It need not be that way, but it can still be masculine. (She became pensive) I haven't really formulated this for myself. (She paused and then said quietly, thinking as she spoke) My idea was, if I get it together intellectually, that's using the masculine side of me, but that is not the case! I can use them both. Somewhere I got the concept that masculine thinking was analytical. (She then became more fluid and excited by her thoughts)I can be analytical but in a way that is not the same as analytical here. For example, you can still see things

clearly, but it doesn't have to be in their intellectual way! (*She finished, looking, sounding confident, excited, as if she had worked something out that had been lurking below*)(I, 9: 155/31)

Darcy

Field record: YOU MENTION, 'TEACHING' 'LEARNING' WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THESE WORDS? Certainly not what is going on here. (*She laughed cynically*) HOW SO? Learning for me equals excitement, curiosity. Even with mundane things. Even those can be stimulating to learn by looking at what is NOT obvious. Even they can involve you.[...] Teaching is NOT about coming into a lecture room, and reeling off a list of references in some order or presented a stripped outline, or being defensive about critical questions, or pretending, so many times in the (*She launched into a new train of thought*) So many times, in the lecture room, a lecturer will defend a point. But privately say a different thing altogether. One to one, they will state their feelings and beliefs. This is dishonesty. I can't stand that. Teaching cannot be about that. There is nothing wrong about saying, 'here is the syllabus. You must do that to get the qualification, but here is what you should know. What we must think about. The questions we must ask. For example, there is one lecturer who is brilliant. He knows everything!(*She laughed*) [...] Once I had an argument with him and I started crying, because he just couldn't see what I was saying. [...] I told him I was glad because [subject area] is a load of shit. (*she laughed*) He was really shocked and he said, 'That's disturbing.' I said, 'Either find methods which are appropriate [...] or stop altogether because these [experiments] are meaningless. You keep on doing the same thing over and over again. To what end. He stopped and said, I've felt that for two years. he then directed me towards a paper by ___, 1985. (*She became very sober*) He felt that. But he felt he had to keep up the pretence. And I thought, how sad. Brave man __ (*referring to author*) After 20 years. Brave man. (I, 9: 89/15)

Field record: (*I asked her to elaborate a bit on what she said about pressure to prove, to translate what she knows into words 'they can understand' (24). For example, is it a question of values? Differing views of knowledge?)* Yes, in some ways you could say it is a question of values. When I say, 'knowledge' for them it means 'the more they put across for us to learn, the more we know.' But , we don't know these things. We're all learning together. Some authority says, 'This is the way it is ' and I am saying, 'No!'. (*She then paused and reflected*) Maybe it's about learning to trust yourself. (I, 9: 197/25) GOING BACK TO LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE. WHAT IS BEING SAID , THROUGH WHAT THEY SAY AND DON'T SAY? Many of them don't know what to expect. They sit back and go along, but in the third year, they begin to question. For example, the 'thinking lecturer'. A lovely lecturer. He's nice. I like him. But when you answer a question, you have a 50-50 chance. He says, 'wrong'. You say, 'why?'. 'Because the books say'. Like the other day. But who is to say that, 'these logical thinkers are the thinkers. They're not to say who's right or wrong. They and we all have points of view. But you are made to feel you are not right.

APPENDIX 47

WHEN 'TALK' GIVES RISE TO A SENSE OF INTEGRATION

Vera

Field notes: YOU MENTIONED TALKING. TWO DIFFERENT FORMS. WITH PEER AND WITH TUTORS. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT MAKE THAT GROUP MORE CONDUCTIVE TO LEARNING AS OPPOSED TO ANOTHER GROUP. IT'S NOT JUST THE GROUP ITSELF. Vera: The fact that everybody participates and you felt, what makes it valuable, I think, is if you feel that people know something when they start but even that's not completely true in terms of they are bringing their ideas into it... Say you are discussing (...) or something. You can't discuss it if you don't know anything about it. You have to read a couple of chapters. What ideas out of that are important to you. The discussion is much more important if people taking part in it, I suppose, it's a rephrasing. Not rephrasing, but interpreting. Like a group interpreting what they read, know, what they have applied. All different points of views. I find it very difficult to read a piece and decide what's important out of that. But if you discuss it with someone else who has read it, you find you don't get 10 points but 25. That's the value I see. [...] And I think in a group it's quite hard to put forward one little idea. It might seem pathetic but when you do, you have the courage to do it, it is amazing how that starts off other people's little ideas and I think it's super. I'm not terribly bad in a group, but it's lovely to see kids on this course get up the confidence to speak and by the end of the term, some are speaking quite often. But at the beginning, and that's super. To see that kind of development. And you saw it here too. With women and girls and all. Ummm. (VI, 9: 030/40)

Field notes: What I liked about Hillcroft, there was a great tolerance of people's differences. WHAT WERE SOME OF THE WAYS THAT THIS WAS EXPRESSED, OR YOU EXPERIENCED THIS? That was not true of everybody, that's for sure. There was quite a lot of verbal argument about people's differences but several people, you would still ask. Like there was one particular girl I had nothing in common with and she was having a terrible personal crisis in the room next to mine and I gave her a lot of my time and I think she would have done the same to me, but we had nothing in common at all and that happened quite a lot. Girls who were quite different in their interests, their political interests, you were here together somehow, and they would keep.. One or two didn't have general sympathy, but even if you disagreed with people politically it didn't stop you from having a drink or sitting at the dinner table with them. No one was ostracised for their views in the lecture or whatever and I think it was fairly healthy. A tolerance. I think it takes a while to develop. I think some people were terribly reticent about sharing in that way. (VI, 9: 029/14)

Penny

Field record: ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT HILLCROFT AND YOUR EXPECTATIONS. YOUR NEEDS. Penny: It's a wonderful place. Very supportive. Just being with other people and you can get very cheesed off with somebody and you forget they are having a bad day but at the end of the day of women together, of women's solidarity, knowing other women have suffered. As someone said, 'My husband thinks I am doolally.' Gosh, I don't think that! Then you think, 'Gosh, I don't need to worry about that so much, maybe. Knowing that dimension. You need men, but it's a break from men. It's like when, you know, you must clean, it's like when you also need to walk away. Build up part of you and then you can tackle whatever it is needs doing and that is good. Along with, I'm sure that women haven't had such good chances in life and these are things that should be obvious. (V, 9: 62/33)

Susan

Field record Susan: Being all female has many positive aspects. I used to be (??) anti-women's libber. I would vehemently argue and defend the rights of men. I saw no irony in saying, 'I prefer the company of men'. But here, the surprising thing was what great company women could be as opposed to women who are bored with themselves all caught up with the price of fish fingers crap. For many women, what they needed was an all female environment . Then they would never be put down. (V, 8: 8/15)

APPENDIX 48

COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCES OF INFLUENCES
THAT MEDIATE DISJUNCTIONAndrea, JANET, VERA

Field notes:: AS YOU LOOK BACK AT HILLCROFT FROM WHERE YOU ARE NOW, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FEELINGS THAT COME TO MIND? BY THE WAY, I HAVE NO VESTED INTEREST, JUST TO REASSURE YOU. BRAINSTORM, JUST AS MANY WORDS AS COME TO MIND. Andrea: I felt cossetted, which is very different from what I am experiencing now. Vera: A feeling of community and everybody being interested in you and in your development. And it was small enough to build up personal relationships. Janet: You knew really that if you had personal problems you will find somebody, staff or other students by somebody would be around. Vera: And you could always find somebody, staff. Like this friend of mine who is at the poly. You don't get this bitching and everybody moaning about their problems. You just get on with it. Andrea: We do get that at the poly. Vera: Yes, but its not constructives, its just moaning. Janet: But here you could always find somebody to help you sort things out. (VI, (: 0105/29)

Nancy

Field record HOW ABOUT GOING FROM HERE TO POLY? What I know, from my interview there is that there are about 30 on the course and then very often they're split into three groups so hopefully, will, the man who interviewed me said, they work on quite similar systems as this sounds like and I think this is important to me. Size of the group. What else? Something that I, which is quite different from what I'm doing here anyway, I think that's quite good to go on to do something which is new[...]SO IT WILL FEEL FRESH Hmm, yes so it will be totally new to me really, so I suppose it will be like starting all over again in a way, but then again, I think I have learnt a lot and it has set up more for that - like the basic things like you know, like writing essays. I won't have to go there and be worried about that, um, and just personal things like that at least I won't have to worry too much about , like exams. I don't like exams anyway. I don't think I ever will but at least I have had some practice here, you know. Before I came here I just used to freeze at the thought of sitting in a room. At least I can sit in it now! ((V, 8: 79/21-2)HOW ABOUT YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF TUTORS? Hopefully, they will be the same as they are here. WHAT IF THEY ARE NOT? I MEAN, HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK THAT WILL AFFECT YOU NOW? Oh, I think it will still affect me but I think I will be able to cope with it better and just get on with what I want to do. I think it's made me more independent and more sure of myself to get on with what I want to do. Yes, it will fully annoy me but it is not something I will worry about really. Probably would years ago. It would have done. I wouldn't have done any work for them but you know, obviously you're not not going to like everybody, wherever you go, and you're always going to find people you're not going to get on with and you know, it's the same as that. You know you just have to accept

them. (V, 8: 72/23) ABOUT HERE. THE LEARNING SIDE. WHAT THINGS STAND OUT AS YOU THINK ABOUT THOSE TWO YEARS NOW. Oh so many of them. WHAT COLLAGE OF IMAGES? I suppose it was sitting in this room. A half circle of people sitting around and we used to have drama in here and history. A feeling of togetherness, I suppose and it was fun as well. Hard work. I think I worked quite hard but I enjoyed it. And I got a lot back from it. It was very rewarding. [...] And when all the things you were beginning to learn, like in the second year, something would crop up and you could link it to another which was quite good. Oh yeah, that is so and so, and that is why the second year was a lot better. They seemed to come together a lot better. (VII, 9: 207-8/37-8)

APPENDIX 49

MANAGING DISJUNCTION: COMPENSATING RELATIONSHIPS

Susan (1)

Field record Another tutor. I had, we are talking a different ball game here because the guy is working class. Glaswegian and just a completely different ball game. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT? He said, I have no time for this holier than thou attitude and that I think sums it up. He's been there, I've been there and 'What that's got to do with it?' kind of thing. In some respects, I also feel for god's sake, let's have done with this silly class thing and get on. It's almost as if, it is very difficult for some on both sides to be objective about it. I feel they have to be objective. If they are going to study the subject seriously I feel you need to be objective. I don't actually see a conflict between that and saying we need for sympathy in it, but look at it objectively first. I don't know quite how to explain it." VII, 9: 180/30)

Field Record: Most of it has been jarring, to be truthful. Within this house, ___, who was at Hillcroft. She lives there also. which was arranged and another woman who was at an adult residential college and we are pretty close. If it hadn't been for Miriam I would have dropped out or transferred. I seriously thought about it and failing that, would have tried to transfer. " (VII, 9: 184/21)

Connie

Field Record: But it is easier to relate to women. With men, they become teacher. They have never experienced what we have. IF YOU'RE OUTRAGED CAN YOU SAY? [reference earlier remark] Depends on the tutor. Some yes, and this leads to a useful debate. Others just ignore you. It doesn't fit their views, and then you get angry. (Connie, I, 9: 056/30)

Peter

Field Record: SO YOU WALKED OUT THE FIRST YEAR? Yeah, with debts and a semi state of depression. I suppose that is why I had been out partying all the time. Just trying to avoid depression and I got a job and found a flat and went back to see some friends and talked about it and they just about persuaded me to go back and finish the course. HOW MUCH LATER? Six months. I had also realised I had no access to decent library materials and had to go to a lot more effort than at university and personally, I liked the, my ___ tutor, and I went and talked to her some more and we decided there were some courses I could do [...] which would help to think about what I was thinking about, which was to some extent true. I decided to, because I had nothing to do anyway. I decided to re-sit, re-do my exams, and I got through them and started my second year the following year. (IV, 9: 074/61)(...)What convinced me. She is American herself and she herself was raging rough at what she was expected to do at college and she

showed me what courses she did and all and she considered herself to raise questions and be a bit seditious and this was impossible as long as she was in the system but this is what she thought she was doing but I had quite a good personal relationship with her because again, I had another chance, so I decided to take the degree. (IV, 9: 036/62)

Sally

Field Record:The two things that kept me sane were the American students and the fact that I had a drama elective. You get two hours a term, when you can choose to do something that isn't attached to your course and I chose drama and I had a fantastic tutor and I haven't enjoyed myself so much in years. REALLY TELL ME A BIT MORE ABOUT THAT. WHAT IS MAKING THAT GOOD FOR YOU? Instead of huge great lectures and people yelling at you, talking at you all the time, talking you into the ground, you don't have to write anything and we related to each other physically, which I found quite amazing and the first few weeks. IT'S NOT STUDYING DRAMA? No. Drama! Like we had to carry each other around carefully. Lovely. And falling. and most touching and all ages and sexes and much more group identity than I ever got in the other situation - my normal group situation in the subjects I was studying. WHAT WAS THE SIZE OF THE GROUP [...] 8-9, others as low as 6, and it is really nice. Close community. Also the teacher. THERE IS AN ATMOSPHERE He is very very good. TELL ME HOW HE IS GOOD. Makes you feel like a human being, far more than learning about ____ seems to. He watches people react and encourages us to criticise each other. But it is never hurtful. It is sensible criticism. Perhaps about the way we walk, speak, and how it can be improved. Because he obviously has in his mind, not us all going out to be Laurence Olivier but how we might want to present ourselves at interview or whatever. SO IT IS RELEVANT. Purposeful, as well as being good fun. He has taught us to criticise and for people to feel secure in criticism which I think is very important and he has, just lets your imagination flow[...] and he has a very easy going nature [...] SO QUITE A CONTRAST. ABSOLUTELY. {...} Very much so. I am very aware of it. YEAH and I can't make out why we have to live in these strange sections where people only seem to find it only right, proper, respectable and status to be all separated and you never ask each other about your emotions or anything like that. (VII, 9: 209/36)

Field Record:(She described how her mother enjoyed looking up things with her, and reading her essays) I asked my mother if she would have gone to university and she said, Oh I would and I felt quite sorry for her. SHE WORKS? No, she is 64 [reference re measles affecting her sight] WAS SHE AN ACTIVE LEARNER? A LEARNER ANYWAY OR DID SHE GET IT FROM YOU? No, she was the one who stimulated me. When I was growing up, we had this big box and full of books and she would read to me. NICE YOU CAN SHARE THAT. I don't think I would have survived it. She is not just a mother but I am aware she is a very good friend. But her reading matter has not always been mine. We soon veered off when I left school but THAT EXCHANGE OF IDEAS. Exactly. I can discuss all kinds of things with her. [Even though] We don't always see eye to eye. (VII, 9:164/31)

Diane

Field record: "[Darcy] has been a big help. She wants to teach. But she is helping me to keep my mind. We spend hours on the phone. I was telling her about that lecturer [...] He expects you to just look at it. But what is the purpose? What do you mean, 'because it is part of my course'. Just sitting there counting. So I talk to Darcy. She is so helpful. And she is good on the intellectual side. But she understands. For example, she will look at one of my essays and say, 'This is terrible' and I say, 'Great, O.K., Give me constructive criticism. Guide me through it!'" (I, 9: 199/19)

APPENDIX 50

CHANGES: AN INCREASED SENSE OF INTEGRATION

Rita

Field Record: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE OTHER THINGS THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF? Well I have more confidence now in that I have quite a good group of friends that I didn't have before and that makes me feel a lot better about a lot of things because there was always that, sort of, feeling that if I let people know who I really was they might not like me, but I have let some people know who I really am. AND YOU HAVE LET SOME PEOPLE KNOW WHO YOU REALLY ARE (she then said in chorus with me) AND THEY STILL LIKE YOU! (laughter) And it's wonderful! SO I AM HEARING A LOT ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF OTHER PEOPLE, HMM SUPPORT GROUP, OTHER PEOPLE. YOU TALKED EARLIER (*referring to previous transcript*) ABOUT YOURSELF, NEEDING TO SEE THE WHOLE AND THEN FILL IN THE OTHER BITS. IS THAT SOMETHING YOU FEEL NEEDS TO INVOLVE OTHER PEOPLE OR SOMETHING YOU..I don't know. I don't know really. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU HAVE COME TO KNOW ABOUT YOURSELF THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE? yes, by learning they don't do things the same as me. So this is how I know what I am doing. I mean, it is when I find myself saying, 'It is easy' and then I think, it isn't easy. It is just something I can do. IS IT ALSO, I AM NOT SURE WHAT I AM TRYING TO GET AT . IS IT THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED TO SEE THAT WHOLE. yes, I get a lot of comments at the bottom of essays [...], the target for writing an essay here is 1500 and I would write 800 and I would say I can't write any more and he would say, 'You've got all the points and it is all logically put down and each one leads from the previous. You have analysis, logic, connections and it all makes sense and you don't need any more than that and that made me realise that that is how I am, doing things. I am not looking to details but what strings them together and once I have got that, I can put the puzzle in. {...} So I am sort of drowning in it and I have to go away and think about it and we have discussion groups as well as straight lectures, so one hour a week will be straight lecture and one hour will be seminar where we can throw ideas around and I take down the lecture notes and I can follow it but it doesn't mean anything until we have had the discussion. (VII, 9< 210/20)

Nancy

HOW ABOUT YOU AS A PERSON? HOW DO YOU FEEL SIMILAR, DIFFERENT FROM BEING HERE A YEAR AGO (*during follow up interview*) I don't think I feel any different. I just feel that what I did here is in the past now, something that has gone but you can't reminisce about it, but it taught me a lot, to stand up for myself and sort out things for myself and taught me I could manage the academic work which I had never done before, so gave me more confidence, to feel sure of myself and when I was say in a shop, before I came here, Gosh I could never write an essay and the whole thing was quite frightening and these people, two had been at university, and they were sales staff and I was in awe of them but now I know what it is like and it is just a question of

adapting to it and anybody could cope with it. It is just the right attitude and I think that is why I left Brighton 'cos my attitude was right because I would never have gotten the work done and I think it is the same with any job you do. Not just studying. NO, I want a job where I feel I can do it properly, however mundane it is, I don't think that is important. Just doing it properly, doing it right and that is how I try to do things. (VII, 9: 20/10) HOW ABOUT IN TERMS OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLE, IN TERMS OF LAST YEAR, {...} I can't see myself. I don't know. I think being here did change a lot of people the way they were in discussions and talking to people. You want to get more out of people and them to listen to you and think its given me that and I have changed a little bit in my, I am more positive in myself and I want to find, I don't know if I question things much, I probably do, but I have always been interested in everything and everybody and I just imagine it has (VII, 9: 21/11)

Field Record: Janet: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST YEAR THERE I kept thinking, this is what it feels like to learn. There was also much the same stimulation, people with ideas. Being triggered. This should be true of any learning. Being stimulated, stretched. Also, doing my first essay. I thought that would be difficult. Because you set yourself a standard. But that was the same as here. it is not so much what they expect but what you expect. You want to go on further each time. You try different approaches over time and develop that little bit more. That's the other dimension I was talking about before. If that is not happening, I have difficulty. But what most of what I am doing is learning, rather than playing the game. [...] But they do have some pre-conceived ideas and playing the game is important to a point. No point in being wonderful all the time. But you need to make sure people know who you are, because otherwise they forget and you become a non-person. But in this department, there are three tutors on the staff who rae good and we share a course with ___, only 15, so it is quite small. (VI, 9: 034/16)

Vera

Field Record: Vera: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH YOU AS A PERSON, HOW ARE YOU THE SAME AND HOW ARE YOU DIFFERENT AT POLY? When I came to Hillcroft, I was not deferring to tutors but there was this great respect. But I soon learned they were ordinary people. At this poly, I don't feel the same sort of reverence. Most of them are the same age as me. Some are younger and I don't have that sort of deference. They treat me as an equal. Some two, 30 years olds, feel they are being treated like children (the women) but this is not my experience. Therefore, so I am more confident in an educational setting. The mystery has been taken out of it and I can have ideas too! This is a hangover from before when anyone who had been at university, I assumed that they were better than anyone else and that there is a mysterious process that happens but then I had this realisation that I was probably as capable as them. Now I see them as just doing a job of work. I give them the respect I'd give anybody who holds my future in their hands. (VI, 9: 08/18)

Diane

Field Record: Diane: The lecturers here are nice people. I realised how much social skill I have and that they have lost something. This was an important validation for me. With that, you can put across what you are trying to say. I've had to draw people out. I keep seeing people who couldn't communicate. It was a real shock to my ideal. And it gave me confidence in my ability to relate to people. Their confidence is just a front. (I asked if this was contrary to her expectations of lecturers in HE) Yes, they have book learning, but not these skills. But they are the ones who are asking us to learn in their ways. (I, 9: 5/27)

Darcy

Field Record: (She referred previously to how her prior experience of learning, in FE and through her mentoring relationships with work colleagues, led her to feel that she was the 'holder of ways of learning'. She then decided to enter higher education.) DID YOU SEE THE FORMAL SYSTEM AS THE HOLDER OF THESE WAYS? She said, assertively, 'They are in my whole self. My whole life. I hadn't formalised this then. Not till recently. Over the past few years. Because of changes in me. But I began realising I generate the learning. As well as receive it. (Reflection recorded at the time: Is there a point at which the formal system is no longer required to validate the self, so you can begin to question it, as a learner??) I asked her to elaborate: Before I assumed that the people providing me with the information were superior. They were, it's hard to describe, a kind of authoritarianism. 'They' have the knowledge. Who am I? My desire was to be one of them. Which has brought me to this hellhole. As a means of achieving status. Therefore, it was a practical vehicle, for status, again. YOU SAID, 'YOU GENERATE' CAN YOU ELABORATE? Over the past few years, I realised this. last year, you see, I cracked up. I had sciatica the whole term. My husband was giving up his job. My stepdad was dying. Everyone needed my support. In the second term of the second year I went to therapy. I always knew I needed this, so I was ready for it. That accompanied by my feelings, about what was going on here, education-wise. Now its not just 'them and me'. Now I know 'his' knowledge is not complete. Neither is mine. He has an opinion. So do I. We may not accept each other's point of view, but that interchange, exchange would change us. Let me give yhou an example. There is one lecturer here particularly with tunnel vision. He did lectures on [cites particular social concept]_ I felt that it is not the concept is dangerous, but what people do with it. I wrote about that, with few references because they were not available on that angle. I got my worst mark ever. 'C'. I had never gotten a C before. I revised it into a standard essay and got an A. (She became passionate) It is bullshit for them to say they do want us to be critical and innovative when it's only with their square that they define. (I, 9: 3/12)

APPENDIX 50b
AN INCREASED CAPACITY TO MANAGE DISJUNCTION

Sally

Field record: DO YOU FEEL ABLE TO CHALLENGE KNOWLEDGE FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE? From a class perspective, yes. But, one of the things I am wary about, I, students in any situation, the more I learn, the more I don't know. So whatever class you're in, you're wary about being a 'big boots' and leaping in and coming out with opinions about something but those things which I feel I have a good grasp of, I feel able to challenge. There is this relative of mine, who works at a university, and I used to think he was absolutely brilliant. But I have suddenly realised that he is not quite as brilliant as I thought, and I very much feel able to be in the situation to challenge him. And I can detect from him that he detects that. And doesn't particularly like it. (locate ref) Field Record: Sally: (referring back to previous transcript) I still feel basically working class[...] Coming here, and I must say, rude as I have been about university, since I have been there I have felt more able to hold a conversation with someone with a better education than I and not feel put down and even if I don't know much about the subject to still feel more confident with them. I am more relaxed and not afraid of making mistakes. Though you do feel this terrific pressure that you are not supposed to make mistakes! I had a long thing with somebody, 'What is this. What is that' and this is not terribly acceptable. You are supposed to know! But I still feel working class [but] I feel more confident basically. (VII, 9: 175/7) (I asked her about a depression she had felt when working in a home for the elderly) I think it is true that depression has haunted me because I felt somehow inadequate but it has taken getting to university to realise that it is not me who is inadequate but others, the world or at least some of the people who have been promoted. I feel differently about myself. I still feel depressed sometimes but I feel far less that is me and that it's entirely my fault. [...] I was told that by a fellow student when I came here, you stop seeing everything as your fault. (referring back to previous transcript) AND YOU MENTIONED IN TERMS OF THE MALE WORLD. YOU STARTED THINKING ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND AND HOW MUCH WAS ME AND HOW MUCH THE WORLD OUT THERE? Exactly, and how it was not his fault, but how he saw the world and he is male and that was how he was expected to see it and I can see a lot of, when I look at it, it was on the cards we would run into difficulties because of the different attitudes we had. ADD CLASS CARD/CONFIDENCE (VII, 9: 165/43)

Sheila

Field Record: Sheila: (I asked her about the kinds of difficulties she might anticipate should she decide to do an academic course) I suppose it would probably go back to social class and I would probably have to go through those feelings all over again, but I feel more able to handle them and listen to people with different backgrounds again. (III, 8: 16/39)

Rita

Field Record:Rita: HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED THAT (Teaching putting you off but liking the subject, seeing it as a personal challenge) I like doing, at one point ___ got very sticky and we weren't feeling an awful lot of backup from one of the tutors and were all feeling a bit criticised by this one. It was a general feeling. Everyone else was building us up and he was just showing us the bad parts without adequately showing the good parts or allowing for feelings or emotions to come into it. I think this was the first assessed essay that went in and I thought, I know you are an o.k. person because I remember you teaching us on the 'Returning to Learning' course and I don't feel very o.k. at the moment and you don't make me feel o.k. but I am going to keep going because I know that. I actually like this sort of subject and actually like you but we shall have to work on it. HOW MUCH OF THAT DID YOU EXPRESS? To the person, nothing. SO INTERNALLY? Yeah, I worked it out inside until I could cope with it. BUT IT WAS DRAWING ON A PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIPS? There was a little bit, and I think there are a couple of tutors who do tend to teach students as children and I haven't been taught by them but I do speak with them and maybe it is because they haven't taught me, that I don't feel they are treating me like that. I don't know how it would be if I were in a class and I was squashed. I might just shrivel or I might just bounce or I might walk out. I don't know. (VII, 9: 39/24-5)

VEra

Field Record: ANY OTHER FEELINGS, FROM LOOKING BACK TO HILLCROFT AND FORWARD TO [THE POLYTECHNIC]? I am just grateful that I was able to come to Hillcroft and that people gave me the encouragement to go onto ___ because I don't think I would have ever made the decision to do it alone without (names tutors) saying, 'You can do it'. I think you have to be in a learning situation which Hillcroft is and to feel happy in that situation to make a step out of it and go forward. I couldn't have done it. I couldn't have taken the step to the poly straight away from home. Yet here I am on a course with some women who have, which I admire greatly, but for me, I would have found that very difficult. AND YOU WERE SAYING THEY WERE FINDING IT QUITE HARD TOO. But at least they did it, which I wouldn't have. FEELING EXCITED BECAUSE YOU HAD BEEN ENCOURAGED... Yes, yes, it was exciting I think, and when I look at the poly although I can be very critical of some of the lecturers, they still say, they want you to pass. They do actually encourage you. (VI, 9:031/34)

Janet

Field Record: Janet: Well, I will be 40 when I finish. Will I get a job? I hope to. HOW ABOUT YOU AS A PERSON? I am more confident generally and more apt to think I can do that. Whereas the younger students won't risk anything. They are so afraid of making fools of themselves but no one notices. I am less worried and I have found I can survive and can cope and about the future, I feel less fretful. I am more able to take life as it comes. (VI,9: 094/27)

Susan

Field Record: (regarding her expectations of university) Well, what I hope for is that I will enjoy it. That there will be the opportunity to learn through participation. I expect lectures and seminars and tutorials. Should in theory be o.k., but lots depends on personalities. But the guy who interviewed me didn't like me. I came away and thought, 'I might not get this place but I interviewed well. It will not be my fault' I was offered a place! He maybe didn't like me but he didn't let it interfere with his judgement. I don't care if they don't like me, as long as they stay objective. Again, this is a parallel with schools. Argument and personalities are separate things for me. For me it is the subject rather than the personality. But so often they take it personally. but the fact they accepted me is more encouraging than if he hadn't liked me. (V, 9: 74/14)

Fran

Field Record: (Ethel: Its like the Grand National. I've spent three years falling at the last bloody fence.) Fran: I don't see it like that because...I could have seen it like that at the end of the second year. I know why I failed at the end of the second year. Second term [...] I'd had a biopsy. I was adapting to having a new body. O.k., the scar may only have been an inch long, but I might have had cancer and I was emotionally adjusting and I had a new boyfriend I needed for my physical self-esteem. I needed someone to love me and I didn't put much effort in. So when I failed, I thought, you can give it up and go back to hairdressing or you can stick it out. And that's what I decided to do I just soldiered on. When it got to re-taking the exams, it all became so important. And you don't have a second chance. Before the exam my boyfriend came in with lipstick on his collar and he had to be shown the door and that was it. I've always done that. If I can't do something I just do it. Which is uppity. (!) Turn it into something positive. That's all there is to it. Something bothers you, say, right, I want a 2.1 So what I'm going to do is pray. I mean, walk into the exams, you don't waste any time. You are not allowed to walk out until you've done 3/4 of an hour, all right so what you do, is you just sit and fiddle, right. 'Cos you know you want to come back next year and do it properly so you fiddle, 3/4 of an hour you get up and you go home. Don't wait for people to come out and find out what's wrong or talk about anything and you stay there until the exams are over and the next year you start off in October with a construction, a plan of action, knowing where you are going (unclear). Anything you want to do you can do if you follow it through. What happened to me, I got to the end of my five year plan of action in four and I thought, now what am I going to do this near now? Not only that but my ideas of what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach, be a full time hairdressing lecturer and eventually run a department. Well, I don't want to do that anymore. So I had to rewrite my plan of action. Rewrite my goals. Ethel: Everytime I write a plan it goes wrong. Fran: But you have to turn it into something positive. So I can't do the exams. You go in and do what you got to do so you can still play the game next October., I shall do, if you've done your project, you've got one thing out of the way. All you can say to them is, is my project o.k.

or should, do you think I should do another. If she says no, it's fine. So forget about that, one less thing to worry about. We all have another life outside. We have our friends. We need that input and we need to see them and , (unclear, refers to someone) who said, write yourself a ten year plan of action. Not five, not three. Not a one. Ten years and have a lifestyle on this course. Unlike a seventeen year old who is creating their own life style. You have to do it. What we have to do is sit the degree with the lifestyle which is very difficult. I've got friends who have known each other since university. They were young. They developed their friends at university. I don't. I've got one that goes back to when I was 4 /. One when I was 16. When I was 23. You are a mature person and you've just collected them along the way. (I, 9: 1/1)

(discussing future plans) WHAT ABOUT YOU? If I were perfectly honest, if there was nobody else in this room, what I would say is that I would like to go on and do research but the thing is, I don't think I am bright enough so I still, that is, nobody can shift that except me, and until I get reinforcement that I am, you see, I am still suffering from. I failed in the second year, so until I do these exams. You see, I am still talking in terms of 'if I pass'. Someone asked me the other day what do you expect to get? I said, a third, straight off. If it is any higher than that then I shall think I am bright. If it's a third, you see, you're in danger of their self fulfilling prophecy. And that's been a problem in studying for these exams. Sitting around not doing anything wishing I was working, almost getting myself into the idea that you're going to fail. So that is, but I would love to do research because I have that sort of curiosity but no one is going to take me in on that,, so I might as well just, let's get more practical anyway. So that's going back to, well, earning money is practical (sigh). My secret fantasy late at night would be to go and do a Phd but you know, I am practically minded enough to know that probably won't ever happen. [...] I once said, to one of the lecturers as a joke, it must be wonderful. I would love to do an MSc and one of them said, Why don't you do it. So when you don't get that reinforcement, you think they obviously think you're not bright enough. But it is reinforced. But spoon feeding is what we both need. ETHEL: You are both better than you think. I should like to get hold of both of you right now and whack! (acted this out) F: But you see, it has to come from inside. It doesn't matter who says what outside. Now Georgette and I have been working together and when we sit and talk and tell each other how good we are and it works but not if you don't have any contact with anyone else. I am scared of sleeping and talking. Sleeping because I am scared the knowledge might just drip out (much laughter) (Someone: right out of the ear!) and talking to somebody, in case they put me down and I can't take being put down at this stage. ETHEL: Look, you two are going to pass. I'm going to fail. Fran: No you're not. Georgette: Tea? F: I must be going soon [...] and will you tell us more about what you are doing? Ethel: It's really good! (laughter) MY GATEKEEPER HERE! (much laughter)
(I, 9:246,36)

APPENDIX 50c

CHANGES: BECOMING A LIFELONG LEARNER

Georgette

Field Record: SO WHAT WOULD YOU SAY LEARNING MEANS TO YOU NOW, AS TWO ADULTS COMING TO THE END OF THIS COURSE. [...] Georgette: After my BSC I shall be a better learner because I shall not suffer nearly so much the kinds of stresses I suffer now. Try not to, like lack of self-esteem. Like after my first year, I thought, I have represented my body of knowledge very badly there and that means I have failed but others were saying, You were just as nice this week as last week. ' It doesn't matter and it turned out that I did all right and my ability to assess that for myself is getting better. But I expect to get over that and something I expect my learning to do for me. Applying [my subject] (I, 9: 247, 29-30)

Pam

Field Record: I like looking in [books] to see what there is and in [profesional journals] and checking what is available and feeling excited and. That's the sort of thing I have always done. LIKE BEING EXCITED BY SOMETHING AND WANTING TO FOLLOW IT UP. The difference is, in the past, I found it more difficult to ignore [something] if it doesn't look useful but now I am much more into what is useful. Less what I must read. there is recommended reading, but I can now say I don't need to read it if it doesn't suit my purpose. My style. Whereas in the past, I would have felt I had to read it, come what may, if it was recommended. That's a difference. (III, 9: 02/17)[...]. YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR STYLE, YOU HAVE MENTIONED THAT A COUPLE OF TIMES. HOW YOU CAN DISCARD, 'MORE AWARE OF WHAT I WANT' 'USING ALL OF ME' ONE OF THE THINGS THAT MAY BE HELPFUL IS TO THINK ABOUT THAT FEELING OF 'STYLE' OF PURPOSE THAT YOU ALSO REFERRED TO. IT DESCRIBES, ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF AS A LEARNER AND A CLARITY ABOUT YOUR NEEDS. ARE THERE THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED OVER TIME THAT HAVE HEIGHTENED THAT? I mean, one of the things that has made me more aware, part of this course, is actually setting a goal of what we are going to read, and then we feedback as to what we read, and I think it is listening to how others read, and how I read, and what I do with that, maybe focused more on what I do. And it feels as if, that I am using, certain books really to help me. e.g. [gives a topic] That's that kind of thing I am looking at , or the structure. I am not reading the book from A-Z, but I am looking at [that topic]. So using the index and getting bits. But other people, that is what I used to do more, is reading the books totally. And I now feel that I find it more valuable, more purposeful, to actually decide what I want to use the book for, if it is more of a text book type of book. (III, 9: 03/19)

Sally

Field Record: Having been given the foundations here, how to learn, I would much rather learn in my own time, off my own back. What I want to learn. WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU DID LEARN ABOUT 'LEARNING HOW TO LEARN'? I learnt how to use a textbook, how to milk it, how you don't have to read it from end to end and how you can take choice bits from it and they can be quite useful to you. I learnt how to look things up that you need to look up. Admittedly, I got a bit of a head start on that because before I came here (*Hillcroft*) as a salesperson, and into promotions and all, I did have to do quite a bit of research so I did have to look things up so certainly, it taught me here a lot about that. I also learnt that there are respectable textbooks and textbooks that are not quite so respectable but that there are people who are very respected. I have learned about this at university, those that are treated as rather doubtful in certain circles. I learnt here how to put together an essay in my mind, not just a matter of writing, but how to focus on things outside and as I said before, how to link things up and how not to assume that, because you didn't have a very good education, that you couldn't learn something from a textbook! I learnt here that if you can find a textbook in the library you can use it for your benefit. Even if you don't understand it all. you can say, 'Oh, I didn't know about that subject' and then move onto something else. and yes I feel that those gifts, if you can call them gifts, are given to you and you never lose them and I feel very capable of doing that. (VII, 9: 15:44)

Marion

Field Record: YOU MENTIONED LEARNING AS A LIFELONG PROCESS. Well, I was talking to somebody the other day and we were talking about when we, do we ever grow up? When do you grow up? You're always learning things. Just experience. Not really academic. I think, especially coming here, I was talking to a student the other day, and you have all this work experience behind you and this must be an aid to study, because you've been in a sort of discipline, but no, I just, I think when I finish, my formal education, as it were, i don't think I shall ever want to stop. I have just got a taste for it. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR HOPES? I am going on to do a degree [...] After that I don't know yet. SO YOU'RE THINKING AGAIN IN TERMS OF FORMAL LEARNING RATHER THAN DOING YOUR OWN LEARNING? Just within, I'm never going to stop wanting to go off and read. Reflection. Study. Killed off at secondary school. Positive impact of the shifts now towards emphasising learning, experiential learning. YOU ALSO SPOKE ABOUT DISCOVERY, ASSOCIATING THAT WITH LEARNING. I just see that, if I am learning something it is, the more you know the more you know you don't know! (*spoken with great excitement*)(V, 9: 2, 3/7,9)

Kim, Kath and Laurence

Field Record: Kim: For the last 10-15 years I have been interested in politics, I have joined organisations and this cut me off also. kath: I have increased my knowledge but it is restricted. I can widen the course on my own. Now I can judge what I learn. This is a progression.

Laurence: Here I can understand what other people without higher degrees in politics (meaning in a political discussion') can understand their attitudes. Again, maybe this is true of any course. Higher Education teaches you to structure your learning. (I, 9: 4/7)

Janice

Field Record:Janice: CAN YOU DESCRIBE MOMENTS WHEN YOU WERE MORE OPEN THAN CLOSED? An example will illustrate that best. For example, my work. Someone else will describe someone as 'loose'. Implication's that the person causes something like this to happen because of the way they put themselves forward. Learned from my own experience that people make all sorts of assumptions about you. For example. My life. All sorts of reasons. Appearances versus reality. Therefore, use that. For example, deducting from that. HAS HIGHER EDUCATION INCREASED YOUR SENSITIVITY TO SUCH ASSUMPTIONS? Sharpened it. Can sit back and analyse. So not always going in with the crowd. But also something which has to be in you as well. (I, 9: 123/3)

APPENDIX 51

ADVICE TO TUTORS

Gaynor

Field record: "...remember what it is like to have no knowledge of that subject at all. I have found that here. I think it is very difficult for the tutor to put themselves in the position of the student who has no knowledge whatsoever, so I think it needs a fairly gentle introduction. (Vii, 9: 261/19) [...] ANYTHING AS TO HOW I INTRODUCE, HOW I RELATE TO STUDENTS? I suppose attitude. Not to be patronising. That's an obvious thing but I think they can slip into that attitude. I suppose that's the same thing as patronising. Not to stand back as the great authority! ___ is very good at it. [...] She is marvellous. I don't know quite what it is, but her manner is very good. I think also because she is very prepared to talk about her own inadequacies. TO SHOW A BIT OF HERSELF. Yes and it means she is more someone you can relate to." (VII, 9: 259/21)

Frank

Field record: "Their responsibility is to point out the central core of the basic theory, to confront you as an individual. You can then decide if you agree or not. [...] But they must draw people out. Reach for their potential. Help you to engage with central theory. It is an interactive relationship. This requires knowledge, skills and personal qualities. Also, they must be sensitive to personal problems because these will distort the learning process. WHAT SKILLS? An intellectual grasp. A degree of lucidity with which they can explain. Must be evaluated on the extent to which they can facilitate people's interest in and ability to deal with knowledge and their capacity to incorporate within the learning situation the views of the students. Especially the older ones. Which may be in direct contradiction and which may not be supported with six million academic references, but practical experience." (I, 9: 266/30)

Sally

Field record: "[You] must take into account that they ARE adults. Any ideas you had about teaching children. These will not be terribly useful. [...] But basically, you must start from scratch and realise they are a completely different ball game. First of all, you must take into account that they have other responsibilities. For example, people here have children. Different times, sickness. your lectures may be disturbed. Therefore, it will be less of a regimented regime. And you may have to backtrack on information rather than everybody sit up straight and carry on. You must be very patient, because most women have the impression that they are no good at things, and certainly, that they don't have as much clout in the world as men do and you have to be patient in showing them that this is not necessarily so. You're repairing confidence. I think you may have to give a lot of your time to thinking out lectures and making them

relevant to people's day to day experiences. And to introduce subjects. If you told a woman on the street with two kids, you were going to learn Schopenhauer today, she would probably run away screaming. So you have to work out with your lectures, how to get the deep elements over to people, in a way that doesn't frighten them before they even start. (V 9:271/35) "I think that is one of the pivots of adult education. Don't have too big a group. They will be overawed. If so, some will be quite vocal. You must use them, take their ideas, but don't let them overawe the others. Encourage those who are quiet. You've got to encourage people to speak, those who are quiet. Don't bully or say, "What do you think?" I would need time to think about that, but I am sure that there are subtle ways in which you can include people in small group discussion. But the women I know, the women are quite enthusiastic. But more they get to know you, the more they will open up. I think they are also very afraid of examination situations and formal learning and they have to be very gently introduced to this, which I think Hillcroft is very good at. (V, 9: 273/38)

Field record: "I have realised, being at university, young people nowadays are much more confident, but when women get to my age and are returning to learning, usually and not always, it is for a good reason. They've lost their husband through divorce or illness, and they have suffered some kind of traumatic experience and need to make a living and they are very very traumatised. In a delicate state. the only way you can describe it is that. And they need not only the ability to learn, but their confidence building. They need to be able to talk about their worries and fears and they need, perhaps extra time given to them, because they might find it harder to learn after a big gap. So many things they need, it is just not true and I don't think these things are taken into consideration. They are here [Hilcroft - where we met for our first follow up interview] but certainly, I am glad I did not just take A levels and go to university." (VII, 9: 191/53)

Fran

Field record: "If I could understand what they were saying it would be lovely. They need to talk to me and explain it to me. I would expect them to be positive and encouraging. Usually, if you ask a question, you end up with a negative. They don't say, "What are the possibilities but..."(shook her head). They don't use a reinforcing way of learning. They just sit there and rub up their own ego. [...] One thing they need to know is how to be a teacher. That's the one thing they don't know. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU? If I have to sit and take notes for an hour, which is far too long, I need something that is constructed in a sane pattern. So when I read my notes afterwards, they make sense to me. [...] They ought to be able to use experience, and break into the lecture, without feeling you are taking them off at a tangent. [...] But lots of them are doctors, but they can't teach. You don't have to, like a secondary education, you have to be a teacher. In higher education you don't. [...] They can't convey what they know. Not only that, when you're at a doctor state, you can only watch out of their own tunnel, and their subject matter. They

don't connect it with anybody else's subject matter. (I,9: 279/11-12)

Field record: "[teachers in higher education] can't convey what they know. Not only that, when you're at a doctor state, you can only watch out of their own tunnel, and their subject matter. They don't connect it with anybody else's subject matter." (I,9: 279/11-12) .lm4

Karen

Field record: You need to approach them on a one to one basis, a personal basis, not as a teacher pupil. WHAT WOULD I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PEOPLE? To be able to assess personalities. To know who can take harsh criticism and the people who need drawing out more. To know the things that draw them out. Know people's names (laughter) That sounds silly, but if you call people by their names, you get this sort of bridge. But the main thing is to treat people as an adult, rather than teacher pupil. " (V, 9:272/13) Don't be too harsh in your criticism in certain situations. Not to be patronising, but put yourself in their position. These women have gone through the same situations as you have. You should approach them on a equal footing, although you are "imparting the knowledge". You're sharing it, not dictating it. (V, 9: 275/14-16)

Field record: "Yeah, it's a specialised area of teaching. Needs special skills. You're dealing with adults who have got all these experiences. And have matured. Whereas with children, they are just coming up to that and haven't got that life experience. And I think your approach to them may appear patronising or unjustifiable. With children you make a statement about your subject and of course they don't question it. But with adult students, you get much more questioning. And I think it is important to take the questioning as constructive questioning, rather than as criticism that you don't know what you are talking about. Also, teachers I know with children, they develop this school-marm attitude. Acquired. But not too welcomed in mature students. (V, 9: 269/16)

Rita

Field record: "They are adults first and students second. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? In the lecture situation, all right, so the tutor stands at the front and gives the lecture and that is reasonable and they are sort of chairing the discussion. When they are not doing that, these are people, who are not your inferiors, not children and that is something I have noticed from some of the tutors. Some of them treat me as a person, whether they teach me or not, and some treat me as a student. WHAT DO THESE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TRIGGER IN YOU AS A LEARNER? If they treat me as an adult, I tend to respond to them as a person. You know, we are talking person to person and that means I can off duty talk about the subject or other things and if I feel they know me and care about me I quite like working for them, but those who tend to treat me, you know, "This is all wrong and this is how you should be doing it." I don't know if I want to do it at all. SO NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU LIKE THE SUBJECT, THERE IS THAT TENSION? Yeah, there is still that feeling there. Yeah, it can be seen as a challenge, but I'm not going to let you put me off this subject! " (VII, 9: 262/22)

Victoria

Field record: "Don't assume that they don't know anything but there again, this a bit difficult. You can't assume that they know anything at all about your subject.[...] But without talking down to them and not going way above their heads so that they are saying, "what the hell are you going on about" But it's amazing what life experiences, especially in groups of people, the amazing things they have done and been involved in and they add so much to the discussion. But you may assume that a student thinks it's totally irrelevant. No it's not. I mean it. [...] And there is no sort of us and them situation either. [...] It's more of an equal situation, isn't it. yeah. And you go over essays and things, but there are different ways of approaching it with adults. Like building up. When you read out parts of essays and things to ask questions, silly little things like that,

because you are apt to think of them as your baby. Your essays and they become very precious to you and if you've made a great boob or something, you don't really want it spelled out. Even if it's only two or three of you. Not always. But it is the building up of the confidence which is the important... I don't know what else to say, really. [...] The ones we get on best with are the ones that are open, are friendly and seem to be genuinely interested in you actually learning something about, passing their subject and having a genuine interest in what they are trying to get over to you. Some enthusiasm for their subject always helps! (V, 9: 265/27)

Penny

Field record: "I would like to think that they will help me to see the things I already have and help me build from those really. I now it's going to be a quite a frightening time. I will be separating from my husband, managing on my own. Something I don't particularly want to do in many respects but I want to be independent more so and I am not cowing [to him] and it is independence that will make me into a better nice person I am sure. AND HAVING a PEOPLE AROUND YOU TO SUPPORT YOU. yes, that's it. RATHER THAN JUST A JOB? And doing something boring and people not caring. (V, 9: 80/37)

APPENDIX 52

CYCLE 8 CHECKS: SALLY

"Like a flock of sheep and lecturers are the shepherds. All galloping towards these fences. (...) Sheep bash at the fence, some fall down. Then another says, 'I made it! I made it.' But you can't stop for those that have fallen down. Just keep going to the next one." (12-4-88, Discussion on journal article)

"Thank you for your encouraging letter. I am struggling on, but finding it all rather traumatic. [she then spoke about her placement] (...) I do wish for once the university would boost my ego a little; instead they make me feel like a young student who needs to be 'structured' and to be told what's 'best' for myself. (Letter accompanying response to draft of final analysis, 26-10-88)

"I suddenly discovered abilities I did not know I possessed and I also found I could actually stick at something very difficult, whereas before I had always given up or tried to evade difficult long term situations. For me, higher education was a form of adolescent/pubescent/transitional ritual which I had 'missed' in my youth. For many students, both young and old, university/poly is a baptism of fire and if you can survive it, then you have a strength and purpose to take into the 'working' world with you. Unfortunately, this reflects our society, suggesting that only the young who have coped with the stress and horrors of higher education will have the necessary aggression to make 'good' in a career, etc." (Written notes on draft of final analysis, 26-10-88)

"I have experienced much tension at university, but I did find myself attempting to understand the bad lecturing, the putting down of students, lost essays, etc. Because being a mature student, I could see how the lecturers themselves desperately needed to fit into the system and to perpetuate it because it fulfilled their needs and compounds a sense of importance of being an elite plus a desire to escape from a world of work beyond the university which may not need their talents or provide the sort of environment they require. (...) I tend to identify with their disjunction." (Written notes on draft of final analysis, 6-10-89)

Although concern about age and gender of other students tends to be a consideration before entering higher education in practice I found integration with young male students not all that difficult. It's the lecturers and their attitudes and prejudices which one tends to overlook before going on to higher education. (Written notes on draft of final analysis, 6-10-89)

"Would it be advantageous for all mature students to have their own university? Perhaps not, because the older student would not glimpse the situation that 'manufactures' the young adult. It also seems a shame to miss the valuable interactions that can take place between generations. Besides, I have the sneaky feeling that

universities for older students would not be taken as seriously as a measure of academic ability." (Written notes on draft of final analysis, 6-10-89)

(on changes)

Education does give confidence to the individual and I feel that being shown how to study and gain information from books/journals, etc is something that can be used for the rest of one's life, for one's own interests as well as for 'formal' purposes." (Written notes on draft of final analysis, 6-10-89)

(Poem accompanying written response)

IN BROKEN IMAGES

Robert Graves

He is quick, thinking in clear images;
I am slow, thinking in broken images.

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

HE continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion

(Enclosed with letter and written notes on draft of final analysis, 6-10-89)

APPENDIX 53

CYCLE 8 CHECKS: KAREN

SW: A COMMON THEME THROUGHOUT FOR YOU IS ABOUT DIALOGUE

K: Yeah, small groups.

SW: "No, not small groups per se but dialogue. But you associated small groups with dialogue. Like sitting around the kitchen table with your tutor or at Hillcroft. What was so exciting for you was just that, that exchange of ideas. But you keep talking about the absence of that exchange at university. What you've discovered is that (a woman friend of Karen's who had offered her a place to stay during this struggle with her essays)) gives you the environment where you get that exchange again. The only place you're getting that [now] which may begin to unblock you. If you can develop your ideas with someone else. (Interview notes, 12-4-88)

K: That sexual thing in the article...Was it you or Sally? About male-orientated? I didn't think that was important. But on reflection, the people I respond best to are the men who are most like women. Who seem to have this kind of female response. As a tutor. Not a friendly friendly thing but that extra something. Feeling valued for your opinion. These people feel more open to more ideas from different directions. More feminine in that way. (...) Going back to Susan's comment [in article] about tutors being the most important thing. I would now agree with that whereas initially I would have disagreed with that. So important how they define their acceptance of what you have to offer. If you feel stupid, or they don't draw people out, there is this barrier. So I would say, yes. tutors are really important. It's a very skilled job. need to be committed. SW: IT'S NOT ABOUT METHODS, IS IT? HOW THEY ARE AS PEOPLE IN RELATION TO YOU. (Interview notes, 12-4-88)

"Very depressing and somehow demoralising. Takes you back to school days and negates your other learning and life situations. I would say relationships with tutors are the most important factor in learning. Not necessarily, 'relationships' but just encouragement. " I feel this course has taught me to learn on my own (...) Its made me draw in rather than expand in some ways. Having got over the identity crisis of 'me' at university, I now have to tackle the 'me': professional, non-secretarial, in a job scenario. I just hope my metamorphosis is complete enough for me to struggle out of the pupa and at least stand on a twig and pump blood into my wings (if not fly off immediately.) (Written responses to draft of final analysis, November, 1988)

APPENDIX 54

CYCLE 8 CHECKS: PETER

(Written notes on draft of final analysis, 25/10/88)

"work looks very good (...) I like the 'with people not on them' idea. Very well put over. Basically it all looks fine and I haven't much to comment on, especially as social relationships and climate were obviously the main theme in our interview. I still think that this is very important to whether disjunction or integration occurs...You're doing very interesting work, aren't you. Keep it up."

"If emphasis is put on facilities being provided for study for students' own sake (which it should be as against all study being for State's/employers' etc) then RESPONSIBILITY falls on students to use this chance well and to help others too (by putting something back into the pot, so to speak) This responsibility could be reflected in the student's shaping own courses, defining own needs and expectations (positive aspect) and also in hard work, making best use of opportunity and helping to maintain a positive and happy atmosphere). I think perhaps this needs to be stressed, to balance the impression of making it all laid on the table for nothing in return.

I think most of my reaction is summed up in that: if it costs money and uses up resources it should not be wasted.

i) by the college providing irrelevant courses and making the whole experience unpleasant in the variety of ways you have discovered;

ii) by student, equally responsible for success of study. I increasingly agree with the idea of 'learning' being something outside of college etc. - even though I am 'assimilating information or acquiring skills at Tech, I learn more through family life, caring for friends, dealing with life's little obstacles, etc. (...) (I thought on re-reading this 'but how to structure such learning and then thought, 'what a middle class male control fiend I am.' "

"I think perhaps something about people 'learning to learn' early at school might be a good idea. Toby is doing so well at Playschool; they take them to visit the 'Big school' regularly and when 4, they leave them there for increasing time periods. Very welcoming and good preparation, with social development starting early and right there in the context of formal education, not separated off as an ivory tower."

APPENDIX 55

CYCLE 8 CHECKS: JANE

"Learning, it is true, for me meant activity related to books or organised activities, not learning in its broader sense. It seems (or seemed) to me to be something where you had to seek help from an outside agency. [Although] of course I recognise that all the other things we learn (e.g. learning to help one another) are learning too - but bearing in mind that the question came from someone writing a thesis on adult learners it seemed likely you would want to narrow the focus of your attention to school' type learning. So perhaps that's why I narrowed my own, to accord with what I felt to be your expectations.

"Vocational ends were not the main motives which moved me to go to College. I suppose they did come into it in an incidental way, in that I wanted a better job. But it was in order to increase my self-esteem and enable me to prove to the world I was as intelligent as I felt I was. I think, though, the most powerful motive was a desperate need to stretch my brain - after being at home with children for 10 years was like sitting squashed up in a car during a long journey when you long to stretch your limbs."

"I agree with your comment that the, 'impetus for the return is lodged very much in the 'here and now' in relation to my first return to higher education when studying for my B.Ed. But when I returned to study for the M.A., it was much more of a vocational move - designed to help me escape from teaching - although I hoped for personal development, enlightenment, and enjoyment too. With hindsight I think it was more vocational than I felt at the time of our conversation."

"From my own experiences of higher education - doing my B.Ed I felt all the positive emotions, and complete integration with my environment. I trusted my teachers, and my success and 'oneness' with the college derived from all the things you suggest in lines 4 and 5 ie respect, communication and support. And I support your assertions, too in (4) that 'Relationships are one of the most important factors' in that sense of integration.

CONNIE 4 up w/-low c/w w/w anCITYSIDE Ap 11, 1988 f o -tes
CHECKED O T IO RUSH REFERRED TO LETTER OF INTRO SHE MENTIONED HAT G'DFREY HAD P EN T
HER ABOUT HIS OWN INTERVIEW, LOOKING FORWARD TO IT

-1-

APPENDIX 56

CYCLE 8 CHECKS: CONNIE

Its like reading about
another person I've moved
on so much since this
interview. maybe my notes will
allow you to see how.

CONNIE 4 up w/-low c/w w/w anCITYSIDE Ap 11, 1988 from notes
TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOUR OWN BACKGROUND

I went to ___ Junior school, In the C stream but pushed into the E
stream. But then transferred to ___ Junior. This was quite a
experience I was quite an expert there but it was a lower
standard of education generally. I had this feeling of superiority

HOW DID YOU EVALUATE THIS?

I had knowledge that they didnt, I kept waiting for them to catch
up it was a nice experience Then I failed the 11+ and went to the
secondary modern. I stayed there until I was 16 I tended to want to
be studious but I was pushed towards a secretarial course because
they werent geared to do anything else

-2-

background
personal
typing
le in
if no
about of
ing away from this

encouragement
recognition
of my
ability
preparing
the groundwork
for failure
Low self
esteem

CONNIE 4 up w/-low mc w/w anCITYSIDE Ap 11 1988 f o -tes
(After school)

I married at 19 and had children within 6 months I was a wife and
and mother for 10 years and I felt totally frustrated, I had tried
lots of things, but none had worked I had all sorts of unhelpful
work things sitting in a great pile I had done a bit of secretarial
work but I flew in with enthusiasm and then that was it
HOW DID YOU LEARN I read books to learn how to do it so I was
always self taught Oh, I did one at class but this was not
satisfying DID YOU LEARN FROM OTHER PEOPLE? I didnt use other
people at all But when the youngest was three I bought this book
IQ for me I had two adult older children My children told me
with my husband about serious things and I felt I was doing
worse I felt Im a cabbage So I got this IQ book and did the
secret testing to see if Im worth anything at the time I was a
friend at the education college and I decided I was going to study
But it took six months to get up the courage

use
ding

and
age
dinate

learning/knowl
believe to
be found
within the
continues
the success,
Paradigm &
growth and
knowledge
to be found
from experience
and relation
to others

CONNIE/4 Up wc-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1988, f om notes
TELL ME ABOUT LEARNING AT SCHOOL AND LEARNING OUTSIDE SCHOOL DID
YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A LEARNER OUTSIDE SCHOOL?

No, I felt like a cabbage.)(Note: she interpreted as after school)
In further education, they were also still 'teaching me' It was not
until an interest was taken in me, and an interest in our own
experience beliefs, values and opinions that I began to realise
that I had been learning. I had always been conscious of what was
going on in the world, but I was not aware of this until then. I was
there three years and got all the O levels. I did much better than I
expected by its, "funny, I still had that cabbage feeling " I was
encouraged to go on. So I did A's in English and Sociology. I liked
Sociology but the two were too much stress. Too much challenge. I
got tense and I still had these self doubts. I dropped
English. It was all about poetry and hidden meanings and I decided
it was a load of rubbish. The next year I did history. It was all
continuous assessment and I got A's in sociology all the way through
but in the exam I got a D. I was quite annoyed because someone had

-7-

CONNIE/4) Up wc-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1988, from notes
told me that I had a good grade in the continuous assessment so I
was too laid back and I rested on my laurels, and therefore I
flopped. This was a new experience! Took it to an extreme! Final
grade was D.

-8-

How could it be a new experience
it was "a self fulfilling prophecy"

Taking
Exams is
a tedious
to be limited
3 hours in
an exam when
doesn't use
what your
intellect is
just a brief
ability to
write down
knowledge to
pass.

CONNIE/40 Up wc-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April 1988, f om notes
HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE FACT THAT IN THE END THE CONTINUOUS
ASSESSMENT DIDN'T COUNT? (including transition to HE)

I was disappointed in myself for allowing it to happen. I did go
back to do the history and got the consolation prize in that they
were surprised at how well I did. With history I was only
concerned with getting it and therefore reducing the odds. Get a
pass. Ignore the rest. Reduce the possibility of damage. Each time I
got a letter saying I had passed, it was nothing but elation. But it
would only last five minutes. Bit like a ladder. Constantly saying
can I do better? SO THE ONUS FOR JUDGMENT WAS OUTSIDE YOU. Yes that
never changed. Even after A levels. Now I was 36 I reached a stop.
I had enjoyed it. But I thought I can't

to a
self-esteem

CONNIE/40/up mc-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1988, from notes
DO YOU STILL HAVE THE LETTER?
he does, I reread it a year ago. It seemed just as relevant to then
as it does to now, I am still going changes.

-16-

I have left the marriage I made the
choice to do this I changed and would
no longer accept the subordinate role and
challenged his entrenched traditional views
of women in society and so also in doing
so I cast aside my traditional beliefs
of a wife and mother successfully because
I left my husband and my son now lives
with him.

CONNIE/40/up mc-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1988 from notes
HOW ABOUT HIM, HIS CHANGES?

He runs a business someone is helping more now, so he is more half
rearted about it (it is too big for him, there used to be all these
big sighs, and he would fidget on chairs. I said start stamp
collecting, or Cigarette cards. He still wasn't that interested in
wanting to know what I was doing. And when I explained, he would get
this glazed expression. But we were lucky because we could talk to
our older children and argue issues with them. Therefore it became
more stimulating and we became gradually less split. Now, I'm
considered a pain in the neck! (said in the nicest possible way)
after seven years in education!

avoidance
in relation of
in the nicest possible way
-17- accepting 'significant others',
reception of 'self' put down
of ability not listening to
herself.

CONNIE 40/up mc-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE April, 1988 from notes
LOOKING BACK

Now it feels like I am serving a prison sentence. Like being on a
treadmill, I got on, and I can't get off, now I want to get out. It
is no longer stimulating.

out, Not coming across as I want to, with friends at and at home, the situation doesn't occur. But sometimes it is frustrating to allow this splitting. But I feel it is an individual issue rather than something to do with mature students.

splitting
separating
comfortable
way out & keeping
conflicts
hidden

IS IT SOMETHING YOU HAVE TALKED ABOUT WITH OTHER MATURE STUDENTS?

(_) is similar (a friend I was met to meet) To some degree I think it is to do generally with women generally. But degree that it occurs varies. I can feel in the inferior position of women but still have confidence?

-24-

CONNIE/40/up w/-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1985, from notes
WAS THE SPLITTING AN ISSUE FOR YOU IN FE?

Less so. Family was more separate. I actually prefer to play two roles, a student role here and another at home. For people at college, home (and study) usually don't meet. It is a conscious decision. You meet them here for different reasons. Two social groups. In my role at home, I feel that I am a 'whole me'. I see all aspects of me. When I speak it's a whole me, I feel integrated in my views and my feelings. Here, because of the split and the way you fit into the role of the student, I am still trying to learn. There are specific assumptions about appropriate behaviour because they are not geared to mature students. This increases the role splitting.

it's
the

-25-

CONNIE/40/up w/-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1985 from notes
IS SO NOW AS IF YOU ARE STILL TRYING TO LEARN THE ROLE IF IT DOES correct.

No I have given up. I have made a conscious effort to separate because of my past experience of dealing with all the tensions and conflicts at home. It doesn't actually work because I have to take her' (referring to self) home. But during the first year I felt it acutely

separating
maintaining
secret identity
relationships
conflict
marriage

-25-

Yes, you are able to use your experience in that respect. For example, you can adapt to the easys. But it is easier to relate to women. With men, they become teacher. They have never experienced what we have. IF YOU'RE OUTRAGED CAN YOU SAY, depends on the tutor. Some yes, and this leads to a useful debate. Others just ignore you. It doesn't meet their views and then you get angry. I have noticed this more this year that some lecturers bringing out issues but this is then misinterpreted by students, seen as an insult. Now, I just put my hand over my face. Lecturers are bear baiting again. If I do join in I restate what has said and identify where they coming just to reduce the tension.

-30-

CONNIE/40/up w:-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1985, from notes
WHAT WOULD MAKE ME MORE OF A LEARNING EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN THIS
FEELING LIKE THEY ARE FORCING YOU INTO A STUDENT ROLE?

Tutors need to remember that they too are mature students and to use that as a way of relating to mature students. They come with experience, how they see us affects how they interact. They must be helped to see that. If you're motivated you'll get it. Your pressures are seen as a testing ground. For example, you'll be a good '___' rather than realising the pressures you are under. I wouldn't want the structure and the knowledge to be changed. Just to have more time, and more emphasis on motivation. But sometimes, I just cannot cope. There must be a positive discrimination towards older people. Also, they must start to learn to write again. They don't accept it at face value. Why? For example, in stats, I couldn't come to grips with this formula. But it was in isolation. NO relevance to the whole. ANY OTHER WAYS OF GAINING THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

what is
required to obtain
a degree can
be obtained
within 18 months
more time
drawing on
life experience
and the
development
of self is
more important
F.S.

structuring in
support groups

-31- less emphasis on individualism

CONNIE/40/up w:-low mc/w/womanCITYSIDE, April, 1985 from notes
(card 31 cont)
Personally no. Been like a _____. In role, looking at knowledge,
language version of that. But again, because they are the elite
teaching their knowledge, they would find it detrimental. We are not
there to guide you through.

-32-

Susan Weil

Disjunction v Integration

Influence of prior learning on adults
experiences a expectations of higher
 education.

The proportion of working class people and women in the study is very high. As is due to the 'fact' that the middle classes manage to gain their higher education at the 'normal' age? The same unfortunately would apply to women, and the black people. All are treated with prejudice as 'minority' groups in spite of their (in the case of working class and women) large numbers - i.e. working class people are the majority, a woman one the other half of the human race! Thought - ~~over~~ overall - globally speaking, white people must be in the minority - why the power then?

The split second you realise that high education is the same academic sausage machine in a perhaps different location as lower education the whole scene comes back. It's academic attainment for the sake of - what? There is no joy in learning, no joy in teaching - knocking off qualifications (for what may I ask) - like Christians carving notches on their halos - no depth, no meaning just

playing some bloody silly game.

Disjunction becomes a learned behaviour, ~~ie.~~^{and} as behaviour tends to be environmentally specific, a recreation of the original environment (real or perceived) will trigger the original behaviour - good or ill.

2) May I point out that even with the feeling of total alienation, there may be the one or more teachers who are able to impart a feeling of integrity.

The people who allowed me to be, to think for myself, who ignored the outward appearance and speech of what must, to the totally middle class eyes, have appeared as a very small, scruffy, deprived unwashed cockney child. Their prejudice (if it existed), was negated, while they allowed me to argue on an equal basis, my point of view.

I feel sure that many other people in your study will echo the above. What of the other 'teachers'? how unspeakably sad that they have the ability to scar for life, do they realise this?

Chapter Six

7. Conclusion - I felt as I read this chapter that the personality had a great deal to do with the persons ultimate achievement - isn't the fighter going to fight on? E.E. 557

Chapter Six

Conclusion -

if it is only for the sheer pleasure of giving their doubting so-called teachers a two fingered salute? Isn't it a frightened child going to become a frightened mature student? who will need more support to realise their abilities?

Chapter Seven -

2. I am bewildered by the sharp line drawn between formal learning settings - a 'life' learning settings by the middle class people. I regard them as 'different' but complimentary. Don't all forms of learning combine to educate the learner? Aren't the descriptions of cycles, discovery experiences exciting!

Chapter 8.

- 2.2. Do you think that the vocational aims cited in other studies were possible, put forward by the students as a 'reasonable' and 'acceptable' motive? i.e. one that the researcher was apparently 'asking' for? Perhaps the genuine reason seemed a little selfish, from people cited prior to this as examples of selfless devotion to family.

14.

Perhaps having voiced the class and gender related differences once, it was felt unnecessary to voice them again?

Chapter 8.4.

Fear - that emotion appears to predominate - reflections of school experiences.

Chapter 9.

1. Once people overcome disjunction - or make use of it - the sudden may have come late in life - but it is surely worth it!

4. The same mentality exists among lecturers as it does among teachers - the need to feel superior - the fact that this is due to their inadequacies not yours, can take an awfully long time to penetrate! [The institutional aspect of H.E. and the misuse of power - this is the same misuse that I found in the sub-normality hospital - what I christened 'the concentration camp mentality' - a difference in kind, but not in intent! The denigration of another human being as a sop to one's ego is hardly a very laudable characteristic!]]

My feelings.

Sadly? I tackled my degree in the same way I had tackled the entirety of my school career. I did enough to get a lower second, and no more. I felt that I had won - not 'them'. There is a book called 'The Loneliness of The Long Distance Runner' by Alan Sillitoe - if you read this it may clarify my feelings 559

and perhaps those of other 'minority' groups. There is also another book 'Educating Rita' this is also a film with Michael Caine (same title). These books are slim, readable, and give an excellent insight into working class behaviour.

You are correct, your Americanness is an advantage - it was so nice to meet a 'real' American as opposed to all those plastic ones I see on the television. I suggest that you trusting us sufficiently to drop your guard is the secret of your very successful and extremely interesting study. At a guess, I would say that your subjects were far more honest with you than they might have been with other researchers. You are correct my cockney is normally reserved for my own people (i.e. other cockneys)!

A stranger in my own country - true always the stranger!

Expectations & Experiences -

No, I haven't changed my mind, I don't fit - total disjunction? It was just like being back at School. Graham Richards was the only decent thing about the establishment (my deviant tutor).

Outside Education - I am still friendly with Gladys - she invites S. and myself to mid-day dinner - to give me a break from cooking, and to give S. and I a change of scenery. Her acceptance of, and affection for S. is easy, completely unforced, and a source of real pleasure for me. It doesn't matter to Gladys that S. dribbles or can't quite get her dinner from her plate to her, without tipping some of it on the floor. Oh God love her, she can't help being the way she is can she".

I don't know if my remarks are of any use at all, you've found what's wrong, but how on earth are you going to put it right? Perhaps you are just pointing the way as for others I do hope not.

4

I loved it, but I would very much like to see a copy of the summary you speak about, if that is possible. I'm sending everything back in case you need any of it.

I wish you would do something for me. S. is only one of many who has been written off as helpless and hopeless. She is neither, I know S. is learning and exactly degree level, but it is still learning, still education. Gradually S. is doing toilet training, putting on and off her clothes, inch by inch acting and reacting with her environment. I don't know if S. will ever be able to do anything for herself, but I do know I'll try. Education is the acquisition of knowledge, at whatever level. If S. can pull her sock a little way up her foot, people like me can get a degree.

All I would like you to do, is to remember that S. is a fully paid up member of the human race, and S. indeed are all the other S. They are not some sort of sub-standard, shoddy, thrown away rejects. There will be no change in attitude at the bottom until there is a radical change in attitude at the top.

All I can do is talk to anybody who will listen, until I'm blue in the face!

I must go now, I hope all goes well with your work. Remember me, but particularly remember S., and if you 561

ever hear of anything / anyone, who could
conceivably help whenever, however, wherever,
if ever, please let me know.

All the very best



Sydney, the 21st of July 1969

Dear Susan, — — — — —

I am deeply and honestly impressed by what I've read. It very much compensates for some of the disappointments which I experienced here, especially at the conference. You have added a unforgettable value to my Australian journey, by giving me an unexpected present just before leaving. Let me tell you why reading of your text has been such a rich experience to me. A conclusion chapter clarifies different layers of the struggle I have been involved in during the last years, and even, to if I let deeper, during my lifetime. Many of my former learning experiences, as a working class kid, were characterised by ^{difficult} instances of disjunction ^{which you describe} ~~which you explain so well in your~~ in relation to the formal educational system. ^{During} ~~So~~ an about period in my younger years, I ~~felt~~ ^{felt} I experienced little appreciation for my learning capacities, although I now intuitively knew. I would make more out of my life than dominant 'bishops and deans, doctors, professors, patriarchy and queer' would allow me. ~~I think this expression~~ This intuition acted not within, but out of the formal education context, where I found strengthening appreciation for whom I was and what I remember the group of peers, with whom I developed streaks of resistance that helped me to develop some kind of self. I remember the later working situation in which I would to be ~~valuable and creative with others and which gave~~ ^{able to cope with life}. I remember the support of my wife who gave me confidence to redirect my life, and to study in, which I had implicitly known for a long time, was the

him to do. Finally, I remember with great warmth, the
otion I received from the "objects" of my study which
me to acquire a doctoral degree. I think I should never forget
these days simultaneous and dialectically interwoven experiences,
involvement and integration. I am grateful that you help me
me through my memories of the past and my dreams of what is
come. You help me to understand why I've done what
one, and why I've been continually concerned, in my teaching
research activities, the about ~~the themes that emerge from your~~
about similar themes as the ones that emerge from your work.
position of - ... the ^{eminence} importance of dialogue, the ^{is a practical process} necessity
expectative understanding of knowledge, the ~~contextualization~~
importance of contextualizing subjective lived experiences, the
ion of the meaning of a personal stance in relation to learning
reactions You confirm in a very persuasive way that I am on
it track and you helps me to clarify one of the theoretical lead-
which I had arrived at in recent times. ^{Your reforming} ~~the notion~~ of 'integration'
great value to my further thinking. I used to understand learning
as which, starting with a moment of threat to the self-evident
world, would bring the person(s) involved to a some sort of a
united life-world, which in my opinion had a quite ^{an} objective
character. ~~Contrary to this insight you~~ In this opinion you
was all about leading people towards the 'right' interpretation
ning of their past experiences. I've always 'felt' that this idea
is contaminated by traditional ways of understanding the
our power to find ways ~~and methods~~ in which people would be integrated 'in my way'.
such process, ~~Contrary to this insight~~, you help me to reassert
creation ^{experience} is not only about "changing" the assumptions of the learner
factive way, but ~~simultaneously~~ ^{should predominantly} be concerned with

early
standing" the assumptions (self-evident life-world) of both
~~us and teachers, children and parents~~ teachers and learners,
and ~~too~~ children, trainers and trainees, activists and participants
who are understood ~~blackboxes~~ in a better way that education
thing to do with the search for the magic formula that will
be ~~transformed~~ ^{transformed} into more self-directed, independent, interrelated
stever persons, but very much with a biological remaining
touch (drawing and re-drawing) of the socially constructed
in which we live. There is simultaneous pessimism and
faith to ~~these implicit ideas~~ ^{on the one hand} that
in ~~this statement~~ ^{in this statement}: pessimism because it makes clear that
we will never find the holy grail that will suddenly solve all
blems we suffer as educators and academics; optimism because
help us realise that ~~education is the~~ ^{teachers and learners are together responsible for} ~~the dialogue~~ ^{the dialogue} is the most
thing, the dialogue about ~~our~~ ^{their} life-stories, ~~about~~ ^{about} ~~personal~~ ^{personal}
in the most ~~valuable~~ ^{precious} way to understand and improve ourselves
a world in which we ~~live~~ ^{live} struggle, suffer, learn and enjoy
ers.

Thanks for the dialogue.

You and Tim should definitely go and see 'Dead Poets Society'
The film is all about the things which you have written and
which are discussed here.

This dialogue may not come to an end. I'll arrange for
you to come and 'lecture' on ^{as soon as your}
graduation problems are solved. I hope Tim will be able to join you
and visit his friends. Please "do with the best", will you "